

THE HOUSE
OF DECEIT



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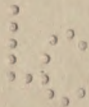
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THE HOUSE OF DECEIT

“Who is worse shod than the shoemaker’s wife?”



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TO
GENTLEMEN OF THE BACK BENCHES

FOREWORD

I FEEL it is well for me to state that the chief person of this story is neither founded upon nor aimed to represent, however indirectly, any politician in real life.

THE WRITER

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THE HOUSE OF DECEIT

PART I

LOVE AND ZEAL

I

LONDON never blinks its veteran eye so good-naturedly as when a young hothead from the provinces rides up on the spavin'd nag of poverty with a conviction in his heart that he is born to make a conflagration of the Thames.

Two or three items in the brief inventory of his circumstances might have driven a young man less heroic and centralized than Maurice Sangster to a harsh, even a despairing, view of London's opportunities for ambition, vaulting or otherwise. To begin with, this young gentleman lodged on the dismal side of a back-street in Lambeth with a cynical and disillusioned cabinet-maker, employed all day in the post-haste manufacture of "genuine old furniture," who entertained, probably in consequence of this deceptive vocation, a thoroughly musty and worm-eaten view of life, with which he took pains to acquaint his lodger on all possible, and generally the most inappropriate, occasions, such as the lodger's departure for chapel or his return from a prayer-meeting.

Mrs. Gowler, wife of this disillusioned cabinet-maker, although proficient in the production of a biennial little Gowler, was not, as she always declared, a "professed cook"; she could neither boil a breakfast egg without reduc-

ing it to a helpless compost of tepid water and liquid sulphur, nor fry a piece of salt bacon without causing it to split into sundry hard and flying fragments at the first touch of a blunt knife. Further, the view from the window of the lodger's attic was almost entirely blocked by an immense and somber tank of water, with a hooded spout sticking out of its grimy wooden cover like a black toadstool that had shot up and overgrown its strength; so that, while the soaring and romantic Mr. Sangster could hear perfectly well the shrill cries of multitudinous little Gowlers in the back-yard below, he was denied the pleasure of emptying his jug of water on these invisible disturbers of his peace, was made to take the air of Nature at all seasons of the year through the damping filter supplied by the reek of the cistern, and could only see the moon with comfort by standing on a cane-bottomed chair and craning his head between a thin window-sash that jammed half-way down in its frame and a very thick bulk of Venetian blind that refused to go up as high and taut as its inventor intended.

Of the furniture in this room, it may faithfully be reported that it was conducive neither to golden dreams nor to ordinary comfort. Probably the entire stock would not have fetched five-and-twenty shillings at an auction, even if Lot 4, a framed picture of Fred Archer winning the Derby on Bend Or; Lot 5, an over-mantel, once of ebony and gilt, but now reduced to a condition of plain deal which had seen blacker days; Lot 6, a patch of striped drugget which struck uncommonly damp to naked feet first thing in the morning and last thing at night; Lot 7, a rickety chest of drawers which usually pitched forward when Mr. Sangster endeavored to get at his wardrobe, and precipitated the looking-glass into his chest and the smaller articles of his toilet into the most dusty and inconvenient corners of the room—even if all these things had been thrown in (and while it might have been an easy matter to throw them in,

it would certainly have entailed considerable ingenuity on the part of any realistic auctioneer to persuade anybody to take them out again), it is highly probable that the whole stock, with Maurice Sangster's library and wardrobe included, would not have fetched the very modest figure mentioned above.

And yet the ardent soul of the young provincial was so centered in his splendid purpose that he was hardly conscious of any serious drawback in his circumstances; he felt for London one of those enthusiastic passions which only come with the magic of dreams to the pure and innocent at the dawn of adventure.

One afternoon in May, a month or two after his arrival in London, this young man returned earlier than was his custom to the house of Mr. Gowler, let himself in with his latchkey, ran three stairs at a time up to his bedroom, threw off his coat and waistcoat as if he were in a vast hurry to fight somebody very much smaller than himself, proceeded to wash himself with a great deal of splashing and spluttering, and a rather wanton indifference to the cost of soap, pulled open, at great risk to his life, the drawers that contained his best shirt-fronts and his Sunday clothes, dried himself, dressed himself, brushed himself, and then, after mature and studied reflection in the looking-glass, flew out of the room as hastily as he had entered, and made with all his might in the direction of Clapham.

At Kennington Church he boarded a tram and mounted to the roof. He seated himself at the extreme end—not to stare down upon the pear-shaped backs of the horses, but to feel the fresh air about him, and to look forward into the golden distance without the obstruction of hats or the annoyance of tobacco-smoke.

The pleasant swinging motion of the tram, the jangle of the bells on the horses' collars, the broken clatter of their iron shoes on the granite, and the sense of definite repose

after his feverish haste, ministered to the happiness of the young man, and produced in his mind a delightful sense of elation. He took off his hard, square-topped felt hat, pulled the tails of his frock-coat over his knees, stretched out his feet to the rail in front of him, and abandoned himself to a most flattering dream.

He was sensible of looking his best. The turn-down collar at his neck was a new one; the little black bow, which just showed a gilt stud above, had only been worn three times before. Although his waistcoat was cut remarkably low, his linen front was so neatly and invisibly fastened with small safety-pins that no hint was afforded of the flannel shirt below. His cuffs were like snow. The black kid gloves which he carried in his hands had never been worn. His shoes, polished in London by an expert bootblack before his return to his lodgings, were hardly disgraced by a speck of dust. He had spent twopence in a barber's shop in getting his face as smooth as a baby's. The smell of the soap which he had used in his lodgings rose like incense to his nose, and contributed to the sense of his refreshment and well-being.

As the tram left the Swan at Stockwell, Sangster caught sight of himself sailing with a swan-like dignity in the shop-windows; he approved what he saw. He was tall and thin, with a pale eager face, and long black hair which he oiled once a week. People were in the habit of looking at him. No one, I think, ever took him for an actor, but many imagined him to be an elocutionist. It was impossible to mistake him for a violinist, but quite possible to take him for a minister of religion.

The shops were left behind. Comfortable houses, with trees and considerable gardens in front, occupied the left-hand-side of the road; smaller houses, nearer to the pavement, occupied the right. His dark eyes flashed as he kept them turned to the more ambitious left-hand side of the

road, leaning over the side of the swinging, dipping tram to spell out the names of the houses, which were printed in gilt letters on the posts of the drive gates. At some little distance from the wide turn in the road which brings one opposite the railway arch of Clapham Station he sprang up, put his hat on his head, and descended eagerly from the tram.

“My word!” he exclaimed to himself. “Why, they inhabit a perfect mansion.”

II

PHŒBE had just laid by her embroidery, and was seated before a small mahogany tea-table in the drawing-room, pouring hot water from a rather elaborate silver kettle into an over superb silver teapot.

When the door opened and a maidservant entered sideways, with her fingers on the handle, Phœbe brightened at the prospect of a visitor. But when the maid announced the name of Mr. Maurice Sangster, and when that identical young gentleman entered the room in his best clothes, carrying his square-topped hat in one hand, and his new black kid gloves in the other, Phœbe Champness felt her heart stop beating, felt the color fly from her cheeks, felt the moisture gathering in clouds before her eyes, and felt her throat become suddenly so dry and parched and suffocating that she thought she would never be able to speak another word.

With a wonderful effort she managed, as she rose and gave her hand to the visitor, smiling her wordless welcome, to tell the servant to bring another teacup. Then, asking Mr. Sangster to take a chair, she sat hastily down before the little mahogany tea-table and busied her trembling hands with the tea-things.

"You have taken me," she said, in her very low and gentle voice, glancing up at him for a moment, with a warm smile, for the blood had now resumed its normal circulation of her little system, "quite by surprise. I had no idea you were in London, none whatever."

"You have not forgotten me, I hope, Miss Champness?" he asked, with a tenderness that was unmistakable.

She thought for a moment before replying. "No," she said; "I have forgotten nobody I used to know in the old days."

He said: "I shall certainly never forget our association in Derby. Whatever Fate may have in store for me, wherever my ambition may carry me, I shall always remember those days."

The servant arrived with the additional teacup on a silver salver. Phœbe and Maurice were silent while she was in the room, much to the young woman's delight and the subsequent excitement of the kitchen.

"The tea is only just made," said Phœbe. "It has stood scarcely a minute."

Maurice put his hat on the floor, laid his gloves across the crown, and drew his chair nearer to the table. He had chosen the smallest and most humble chair in the room. Most of the other chairs seemed to say to him, "Don't sit on us, if you please;" while the handsome footstools deposited over the Brussels carpet seemed to be saying, "We are not for *your* feet." The young man felt that the marble mantelpiece thoroughly despised him; that the great ugly pictures in their gilt frames were looking down upon him; that the glass cabinets knew his origin; and that the magnificent brass chandelier was perfectly acquainted with all the details of Mr. Gowler's establishment in Lambeth. But chief of all his causes for uneasiness and self-consciousness, far exceeding anything else in that big room, pompously furnished in solid unemotional bad taste, far exceeding

every inanimate decoration, every soulless splendor, every static evidence of prodigious wealth, was Phœbe Champness herself, the living, breathing, fluttering, awfully dynamic Phœbe, who had become, since he last saw her, a lady of fashion, and unquestionably one of the beauties of the Metropolis.

"I dare say you are wondering," he inquired, "why I am in London. Thank you; two lumps."

"Tell me," she said.

He rallied the Radical within his bosom, threw off the inconvenient suggestions of the grand furniture surrounding him like so many policemen, noting down every word he said to be used as evidence against him, and, taking the teacup from her, began at once to use his spoon and speak at the same time.

"Well, Miss Champness," he said, "to begin with, Derby was too small for me. It hampered me; it crushed me. If I had stayed there another month, it would have suffocated me. I took steps to escape. I determined to break free from the pettiness of that environment; and now I *am* free. I am a Londoner, and the world is before me, the path of glory shining in the sun!"

He laughed, helped himself to some buttered scone, and then, remembering his religious obligations, said: "Forgive my rhetoric. I am on fire with ambition. Shall we ask a blessing?"

They both rose from their chairs, he on one side and she on the other of the silver tray, the silver kettle, and the silver teapot. They bowed their heads over the table, and Mr. Sangster asked a blessing, which, perhaps, was more in the nature of a three minutes' discourse than a momentary acknowledgment of Divine Providence.

She was thinking, while he spoke so contemptuously of Derby—that happy, beautiful, and friendly town of her childhood—thinking of the days when she taught with him

in the same Sunday-school, watched him in chapel as he conducted visitors here and there, distributing hymn-books among them, collecting alms at the conclusion of the service, and praying so fervently, so eloquently, at the subsequent prayer-meetings. She was thinking, too, of how they would talk together in the Sunday-school, how they occasionally met in the streets of Derby, how they sometimes walked for a little distance side by side, and how she would very often go up to her bedroom and sit at the open window wondering to the sentimental lilt of the more melancholy hymn-tunes whether it could even be possible for a solicitor's daughter to marry the son of a newsagent, however handsome, romantic, and pious.

And as she thought of these things, her simple, rather wistful, and Quakerish little face became almost pretty.

They sat down after the grace, and began to eat in silence. His blessing had recalled the past very vividly to her memory, and she was profoundly moved.

"Can you guess," he asked, picking up a piece of scone from his waistcoat and putting it in his mouth, "what I am doing in London?"

He looked up as he spoke, young, earnest, eager, full of a self-confidence which filled her half with admiration and half with fear for him. He saw how pretty she looked, was aware in some degree of the feelings with which he inspired her, and began to think that his dream was possible in spite of the grand furniture.

And yet he doubted. She had become so completely a lady of London. Beyond all doubt, she moved in the most exclusive circles of Clapham society. Her father was now a man of the highest reputation and fabulous wealth; he was probably acquainted with members of Parliament, and attended the great social functions of the Liberal Party. Phoebe would no doubt marry an aristocrat and become a

favorite of Mr. Gladstone, perhaps be photographed with him on the terrace of Hawarden Castle.

Nevertheless—unfortunate and stubborn fact in a situation already aggravated by other difficulties—he loved her with clamant hunger and thirst. He had loved her as a boy in Derby, had dreamed about her, written poems about her beauty, paced guiltily at night in front of her father's double-fronted villa residence looking up at the rim of gas-light round the upper windows as though those windows had been the enchanted casements of Venus. And now, with her delicate, soft brown hair dressed in that delicious manner; and now, in this most elegant and bewitching dove-colored dress, with an amethyst brooch in the lace on her breast, gold bracelets on her wrists, and a gold chain round her neck; and now, with this sense of dignity, grace, magnificence, and a woman's soul breathing from her, visible in all her gestures, audible in the tones of her voice—ah! how much more did he love her, how infinitely more did he desire to pluck the stars of glory out of heaven and lay them all at her feet! But how wild a dream!

Her heart thrilled with hope when he asked her with so much confidence if she could guess his occupation in London. She looked at him expectantly, shook her head very prettily, and said, "Tell me," inquiringly.

With great seriousness he replied: "I am organizing the political side of Nonconformity. I am welding, Miss Champness, into one tremendous and overwhelming synthesis the scattered and dismembered politics of the Free Churches."

A shade of disappointment dulled her bright eyes. "I thought," she said gently, "that perhaps you were training for the ministry."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "you remember my old ambition—my first, my earliest, my very dearest and most precious ambition. But, Miss Champness, I have thought this mat-

ter out. There is no great opening there, no national and universal opening for a consuming ambition; and now the Lord has opened another door."

She put out her hand to take his teacup. "I remember," she said, glancing surreptitiously at the pattern made by the tea-leaves on the side of the cup, for she was just a little superstitious—not seriously, of course—"I remember how we all used to think that one day you would be a famous preacher."

"And even now," he said, with kindling eyes, his pale face flushing with pleasure, "that first ambition revisits and takes possession of my soul. When I go to some of these huge London chapels—Newman Hall's, for instance, or Spurgeon's—and see the vast congregation filling all that mighty space, I feel again the passion of the old call, the inspiration of that earliest ambition, and I am inclined—almost inclined—to become a preacher." He took his teacup from her hands, helped himself to a slice of Genoa cake with almonds on the top, and continued: "But I am satisfied that the real call for me is in another and more stormful direction. I feel assured in my heart and soul that religion has got to be organized on a political basis. We shall get nothing done by preaching. Our work, Miss Champness, is to dominate the Liberal Party, and force it, drive it, compel it, to execute our wishes. That's the future of Nonconformity. And in the providence of God I believe it is also the future of Maurice Sangster."

He began to eat his cake, and she looked down at the tea-tray, fluttering, wondering, and perplexed. "It sounds," she said, touching the edges of saucers and the handles of teaspoons with her fingers, "very important and serious work."

"The work of a fighter, Miss Champness, an Ironside of the nineteenth century. You are right. It is serious work, grand work, a man's work, and I am up to my eyes in it!"

For some moments they were silent, and then Maurice said to her, rising in a bent attitude to empty cake-crumbs from his waistcoat on to the silver tray: "You must feel how different London is from Derby. Don't you love the bigness and the rush of London—the seething of millions of minds, the pressure of millions of bodies, the breathing of millions of souls? Ah, what an inspiration it is! And your house here! It is a mansion. This sumptuous room, for instance. How different from your father's villa in Derby!"

She smiled as she answered: "I was just as happy in the old home."

He shook his head skeptically. "Just as happy, perhaps; but you can't help feeling that this is on a grander scale, that you are nearer to the great heart of humanity. Why, it's splendid! Doesn't your brother like it? Doesn't he feel the rapture of life in London? By the way, how is he? I hope very well."

"Leonard?" she inquired. "Yes, thank you, he's very well indeed. He's at Oxford, you know."

Maurice smiled indulgently. "Oxford!" he exclaimed. Then he said forcefully: "I am of one mind with Carlyle: a man's best university is a library of standard authors. Bohn is my Oxford and my Cambridge; it gives me all I want. But Oxford men—well, they seem to me either ruffians of a most coarse and brutal nature, or mere posing dilettantes of an effeminate and namby-pamby character. Truly, I'm glad I never went to Oxford. Cromwell's my hero. We want fellows like that. Men who can do things. Big grappling men, giants! Heroes who can take hold of a situation and shape it with hands of iron.

" 'Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour—
England hath need of thee!'

But Oxford men! After all. Miss Champness, what is the use, what can be the use, in an age of strenuous commercial-

ism and political upheaval, of Latin and Greek? Why bolster up these old dead languages? Is not the whole thing a kind of esthetic pose, like bamboo furniture and fans on the wall? What do working men care for Latin and Greek? What is the utility of perished languages to a democracy rising from death into life? And then, there's the social influences of a place like Oxford. Wholly bad! It makes snobs. Don't you agree with me? Look, for example, at the clergymen of the Established Church, ministers of the Christian religion, forsooth! Where will you find such exclusiveness, such petrified snobbery?"

"There is always that danger, of course," she answered gently, marveling at his eloquence, and so pleased to be talked to and consulted as a rational person of some importance in the world. "But I don't think," she added, with a smile, "that Oxford will make a snob of Leonard. He's so solid."

"What does he intend to do in the world?"

"I think he will join my father."

"Your father is a great man nowadays. A huge business, I am told. Interests all over the globe. I have been thinking about him. Do not say anything to him just at present, but later on I think I may have propositions to make which will please him. You see, Miss Champness, your father is organizing the wealth of Nonconformity, while I am organizing the politics of Nonconformity. He can help me, but I also can help him. We won't hurry things. We won't be precipitate. But wait, you will see. Great things are ahead."

She was quite captivated, her faith in him growing with every minute. She had hoped he might have been entering the ministry, because she did not think her father could object to her marrying a pastor; but without knowing very much about politics, it seemed to her that if Maurice could speak so assuredly of his position in the world, likening it to

the position occupied by her father, and hinting that he and Mr. Champness might do great things together, surely this was even better than the pastorate.

She said quite cheerfully that she was sure her father would be glad to see him, and Maurice inquired if Mr. Champness had changed at all.

"No, not in the least," she replied. "He is busier and more occupied, of course; but he is just the same in himself. I don't think he will ever change or modify his opinions."

"Thank God for that!" ejaculated Maurice; "for your father, Miss Champness, is the best type we've got of Victorian Nonconformists—sound Radicals, practical men of business, faithful Dissenters. We want every one we have got."

He rose with energy and said: "Shall we return thanks?"

After this grace, they stood in awkward silence for a moment. Then she said, looking up at him: "Would you like to see the garden? We've got quite a nice piece at the back."

He remained looking at her, his eyes shining, his face slightly flushed, a gentle smile at his lips. He was happy. He was warm with emotion. He was full of thanksgiving. "Yes," he said; "let us walk together."

When they were walking in the garden he said to her: "Do you think it very bold of me to call upon you, Miss Champness?"

"Why should I?" she replied very sweetly.

"You are the daughter of a rich man," he answered, "and I—well, at present I am at the bottom of the ladder, poor, and the son of a newsagent."

"What does that matter?" she interrupted.

"Do you think like that?" he asked eagerly.

"Of course I do. I don't think class distinctions ought to exist. We're all one in the sight of God. We ought to

help each other, instead of separating into classes and groups. Humanity ought to be a brotherhood."

"I *am* glad to hear you say that!" he exclaimed, waving his black kid gloves in the air. "You don't know how glad I am. I was afraid fashionable life might have spoilt you. But your views are my views. We're going to smite the Tories hip and thigh. We're going to humble the pride of the Established Church. We're going to smash the power of the landowners; and the real brotherhood of man will come in our lifetime—in your lifetime and my lifetime, Miss Phoebe. Gladstone's preparing the way. His successor will open the gates of heaven."

She nodded her head, smiled, and said: "I'm afraid I don't understand politics very much. All my time is taken up with the work at the chapel. But I'm glad you are so hopeful."

They were still walking in the sunshine of the garden when Mr. Humphry Champness arrived from the City. They looked up at the same time, and saw him standing by one of the open French windows of the drawing-room, regarding them. They both hurried forward, and he stood watching their approach.

III

MR. HUMPHRY CHAMPNESS, financier and solicitor, never knew what it was to be ill. His digestion was perfect. His faculties, kept always active and alert, were never at a fault. He lived unconsciously by rule, wise habits in youth having established for him an elaborate ritual of existence, which he obeyed without the sense of obedience. And he held that every man might be as well and fit—not as able, of course—as he was, always had been, and anticipated being to the end of his life.

He would say to his friends: "If I am ever ill, I'm too busy to know it." In addressing a young men's meeting, he would say to his respectful audience, after a preliminary reference to the grace of God: "Cultivate in yourselves the feeling that you are getting on in the world. Put by your money. Save something every week. Always be a little richer than you were. Believe me, the finest medicine in the world is the feeling of prosperity. It is only the man who *has* got on, or the man who feels that he never will, or never can, get on, who falls a victim to depression and imaginary illness. Never retire. Stick to business. Die in harness."

He was a tall, broad-shouldered, upstanding, clean-shaven man, rather hard of feature, slightly cold of eye, and certainly of a forbidding firmness as regards the mouth; nevertheless, a fine, handsome, dignified pillar of our commercial greatness—a man who would have looked well on the Government Bench, who would have admirably become a judge's wig and gown, who might even have passed in apron and gaiters for a bishop who had been a schoolmaster. No one could have said of him what Richter said so charmingly of another man, that his face was a thanksgiving for his former life and a love-letter to all mankind. Rather might one have said with Tourguénieff that he had the air of his own statue erected by national subscription, and upon that statue, perhaps, might truly have been engraved the epigram on a French statesman: "He spent his life in coming to the rescue of the strongest." Nevertheless, this great, honorable, and fearless financier, who had the cold, unemotional temperament of all great gamblers, was a fine, impressive personality, contact with whom braced the faculties of the weak, and brought a sense of shame to the dabbler and the coward.

He was entirely without the weakness of sentiment, except in the domestic and religious spheres. Outside his

home and outside his chapel, he regarded humanity only as the servants of Capital. His contempt of the liberal professions was only equaled by his devotion to the Liberal Party. He despised book-learning as he despised the Established Church, and hated art as he hated the Roman Catholics. Life for him was, very obviously, a solemn business. He could not understand how men could paint pictures, write poetry, and chatter about architecture, furniture, and china, while there was real work waiting to be done in the world, and the Judgment Day loomed nearer every hour in the perspective of the future. By real work, he meant the civilizing of heathen races, the development of commerce, the reform of such abuses as touched his religion and his social position, and the abolition of all wars and all tariffs of every kind and description.

He had succeeded as a young man of eight-and-twenty to his father's business in Derby. At thirty-five he had made it one of the best practices in the Midlands, with the rightly deserved reputation of being as upright, sensible, and acute a man of business as you could find anywhere in England. At this time he came into financial relations with a London solicitor who enjoyed the confidence of many wealthy people in the world of Nonconformity. The relations of Mr. Champness with this lawyer were amiable and profitable. The connection between them continued for six or seven years, with increasing advantage to both parties; at the end of this period the London solicitor proposed to the Derby solicitor an amalgamation of the two firms, and the arrangements were completed with that wonderful dispatch which only lawyers can accomplish when managing their own affairs. For five years Mr. Champness continued to live in Derby, merely visiting London on particular occasions; but early in his forty-ninth year the business in London had swollen to such prodigious proportions that he was obliged to pull up his roots and

remove his family to the Metropolis. The death of his wife a few months before, to whom he had been fervently attached, made it easier for him to make this departure from his native town.

At the age of fifty-three he was one of the most respected of the smaller financiers in London. His interests now covered the whole world, with the exception of British colonies, in which he had no faith, and for which his political traditions denied him any sympathy. His own personal capital was infinitely larger than his son and daughter had any idea of; his partners were not even aware of his true position. He himself could see no reasonable limit to the growth of his fortune. He gave liberally, but not ostentatiously, to the charities of his chapel and to the funds of the Free Churches. He took the chair at meetings, read the lessons in the chapel, gave addresses to young men, and encouraged missionary energy. He was in his office every morning at a quarter-past nine, and he seldom left it until six.

It was either fortunate or unfortunate for Maurice Sangster, as the sequel will show, that the financier had returned at an earlier hour than usual in order to take a high tea before setting out to speak at a very important meeting in the Exeter Hall.

IV

WHEN Sangster had departed, not quite sure whether he was standing on his head or his heels, Mr. Champness said to his daughter: "I have no doubt that this young man will get on in the world; he has thrust, drive, and he does not know his place; but until he has begun to get on, do not encourage him to visit us."

As for Maurice, burning with love for Phœbe, and persuading himself to believe that he had made a favorable impression on the financier, he walked all the way back to his Lambeth lodgings, feeling himself to be more inspired than he had ever yet been to set the Thames on fire and win this very peerless lady for his wife.

He said to himself: "I will go back, write hard for an hour, take a mouthful of supper, and then read till midnight." This was his preparation for setting the Thames on fire. He was no dreamer and no fool. He had realized in youth, as a journalist in Derby and a member of a debating society, that to make one's way in the world one must have Whittaker's Almanack by heart, know thoroughly the more recent records of Parliamentary History, and be able to speak in public with assurance and absolute knowledge of one's facts.

Unhappily for this ambitious young man, he found the door of Mr. Gowler's house standing open, and Mr. Gowler himself sitting in his shirt-sleeves on the lowest step of the staircase, smoking a dull and charred briar pipe, with his back leaned against the wall, and one of his carpet slippers posed against the banisters.

At sight of Maurice, Mr. Gowler, who was fat, untidy, and of a wheezing habit in the matter of respiration, took his pipe from his mouth, elevated it slowly some few inches above his head, and exclaimed in a husky voice: "Ah! I was just thinking about you."

With the utterance of this welcome, delivered in that particular tone of voice which implies "more to follow," Mr. Gowler put his disreputable pipe back into his mouth, wheezed heavily, became purple in the face, and, clutching hold of the banisters with one hand and pushing himself up by means of the wall with the other, contrived at last to get painfully upon his slippered feet. After balancing himself for a moment, snorting and creaking as he swung

backwards and forwards, Mr. Gowler again took the pipe from his mouth, pointed the moist stem in the direction of his lodger's linen front, and jerking his head towards the basement, said: "Maud's back."

Ominous words for the single gentleman! To another person—a stranger, for instance, from some distant country—these words might very easily have been taken to refer, with some dark and cabalistic significance, to the shoulder-blades of a lady named Maud, age and social status uncertain; but to Maurice Sangster, the studious single gentleman, the passionate lodger, these words meant only one thing—they meant that Fate had conspired to rob him of his peace.

For the lady referred to as Maud was Mr. Gowler's eldest daughter, a housemaid, and, unfortunately for Mr. Sangster's happiness, Maud Gowler had confided to her mother, speaking with her habitual nasal drawl, and a strong South London accent: "Why, I fell in love with him as soon as ever I set eyes on him!" The intimation of her passion having been conveyed that same evening to Mr. Gowler, the old gentleman, with the bile of Voltaire, the heart of Schopenhauer and the brain of Machiavelli, had set himself to work at the business of getting the young couple established in what he termed a "connubial misunderstanding." "Mind you," he said on one occasion, speaking to Maurice of his daughter's fascination for men, "she's at an earning age now, and I shouldn't be altogether pleased to see her snapped up, after all the money I've laid out on her; but snapped up she will be, and quick—*very* quick. Lord bless you! a girl like her doesn't have to stand on one leg singing, 'Dilly-dilly-dilly-dilly, come and be killed.' What a cook! What an air with her! And what a saving, sensible, and economical disposition! Why, she's worth fifty of the ordinary sort you see walking about with bows on their shoulders and ribbons streaming out behind like

halter-ropes hanging round a donkey's neck—fifty of them!”

This paragon of a daughter was always going away and always coming back. The younger children were never surprised when they missed her of a morning, and heard the news, “Maud's gone”; nor were they astonished when they heard the announcement, “Maud's back,” and found their eldest sister sitting at the kitchen tea-table, making her mother's hair stand on end with accounts of her last mistress's enormities. The curious thing about Maud Gowler was this: although of a very disparaging and unemotional nature, she invariably described each fresh place on her visit home in the hours of a night out as a perfect paradise, making herself to be the bosom friend of the mistress and the favorite pet of the children; whereas when the phrase was sounded, “Maud's back,” nobody could possibly exceed in bitterness, contempt, and the most acrid indignation, her judgment on that household from which she had just departed with a month's wages in her purse.

When Mr. Gowler said to Maurice Sangster, “Maud's back,” he winked his right eyelid, and pointed with the stem of his pipe to the basement stairs. “Come down and have a bite,” he added—a corollary of the previous sentence, which might have suggested to anyone ignorant of the true circumstances that Maud had once been a familiar and favorite porker, and was now reduced to an edible condition of boiled bacon.

Maurice smiled, shaking his head. “You must really excuse me,” he said firmly—“you really must.”

Mr. Gowler laid a detaining hand on his arm, looked up perplexedly into the pale, ecstatic face of his lodger, and said: “But why? I say, why? See here, now; a little society would do you good; I'm sure it would.”

“No doubt, Mr. Gowler, no doubt. But I have work to do. You must excuse me.”

“A word as to that,” answered Gowler, putting back his pipe into his mouth. “Now, why do you study so hard? What’s the good of it? Have you ever considered study from this practical point of view: *Life ain’t worth it?* What a man wants in life is just natural ability, nothing more; anything else makes a fatigue of it. A wise man sits down comfortable, and lets the wind blow him along; he don’t go bothering his brains to know more than comes to them in the way of Nature while he’s enjoying of himself.”

In vain did the single gentleman endeavor to escape. Gowler was not inexorable, but he was pathetic. “Look here, Sangster,” he said at last, lowering his voice, looking over his shoulder towards the basement, and shuffling a step nearer, “the ladies expect it of you. Just a minute, my son—just a minute.”

Can you imagine the feelings of Maurice Sangster, fresh from the superb refinement of Phœbe’s drawing-room in Clapham, and thirsting to be filling his mind with the incontrovertible statistics of Whittaker’s Almanack in order that he might the sooner win that exquisite lady for his wife—I say, can you imagine poor Maurice’s feelings as he followed the tedious back of Mr. Gowler down the dark and odorous basement stairs, and entering the hot and steaming kitchen of Mrs. Gowler, came face to face with Maud in her Sunday best?

It was like Maurice to shake off his annoyance, to smile pleasantly on the Gowler family, and to take a chair at the table with all the air of a man thoroughly happy and prepared to be hearty.

“You two,” said Mrs. Gowler, who was nursing a baby, and had two other children standing at her knee for comfort—“you two look as if you’ve just come from a wedding. Just! You do. Straight!”

“Ah!” exclaimed Maurice, wishing to make the best of things. “I’ve just come from taking tea with a young

lady at whose wedding I should not in the least mind being present, provided I was just a little nearer to her than the best man!"

There was an awkward pause for a moment, no one laughing at the witticism. Then Maud said in her cynical, drawling fashion, "Why, I believe he's in love! Oh, lor! I should never have thought that."

"Wouldn't you?" asked Maurice. "Why not? A man ought to be in love; it gives force to his will, energy to his purpose, fire to his work; but in the case of a strong man, love must never come between him and his destiny."

Mrs. Gowler looked helplessly from Maud to her husband, and from her husband to Maud, rocking the infant she was feeding as though it needed comfort for a broken heart.

"Sangster," said old Gowler, munching his lips, "don't you make a fool of yourself. Don't you go and kill yourself for the sake of ambition that will only come back and catch you a whack on the right eye, like a ta-ra-ra-ra-boomderang. You enjoy yourself. Take life as it comes to you, same as I do. Why, Bedlam's chock full of fellers like you, who thought they were going to be Dick Whittingtons, poor fools! and now they do nothing but mew and spit like his cat. Ambition's a slow poison. It begins with honey, and ends with a bee in the bonnet. Chuck it, my son, chuck it."

Maurice laughed, and let fly at old Gowler with all his might. He talked of ambition like a poet: spoke of the injustice in the world, of the tyrannies, persecutions, and bitter wrongs of the poor. He asked Gowler, he asked Mrs. Gowler, he asked Miss Maud Gowler, one might almost say that he asked all the biennial little Gowlers—for the sweep of his right arm embraced the whole kitchen—whether it was not a fine thing, and a right thing, and a god-like thing, to rise up and utterly smash, overturn, and grind into pulverized dust the human fiends responsible for all this anguish and cruelty.

"Oh, hark at him!" cried Maud Gowler. "I never knew a man like you for words—never, I didn't. I was only saying to my last mistress, telling her about home, and as how mother kept a lodger, that you was really a torrent of words, and that when anything set you right off, they fair gushed out of your mouth, like water out of a pipe."

She was above the average height, very thin, flat-chested, and of a painfully bilious complexion. Her cheeks were often flaming red in the center, while the rest of her face remained its wonted gamboge. She was brown-eyed, dark-haired, with a little tight fringe, which ran up from one ear, made the curve of her forehead, and descended with a slope to the other ear. She carried her eyebrows high, elevated her eyelids and depressed the corners of her lips. In walking, she shook her shoulders from side to side, and when daintily inclined, held her arms crooked at the elbows, the forearms extended in front of her, the hands flapping at the wrists. She had the settled expression of one who is always expecting a reproof, and is always ready with a back-answer.

"Torrents of words and gushes of words," said old Gowler, "is only words, after all; they don't alter the facts of life. What's the use," he demanded, "of *talking* about life? What we've got to do is to *live* it. Ah! Get what we can out of it. Enjoy ourselves. Take things easy. Mind our own business, and see that the other fellow minds his. Politics!—a lot of 'umbug. Here! do you know what makes me despise the working man more than anything else?—why, being took in by a lot of diddling windbags promising him something that will never come—ah! and something that never *can* come. Stop a bit! I haven't near finished yet. I'm a bit of a torrent myself when I come across a crazy fellow like you spoiling his life for a hokey-pokey. Now, I ask you, and you answer me. Has France

had a Revolution, or has it not? Is America a Republic, or is it not? Are the people in France any better off after their Revolution than the sensible, sober, and saving working man in this country, without a revolution and under a monarchy, with an old-established aristocracy what spends money freely, attracts the American millionaires, and is good for trade? Tell me straight, now, a clever fellow like you—tell me, are there any poor people in France and in America? I'm asking for information. Now, you tell me. Are there? Oh, don't you torrent and gush to me about politics! I know all about politics. And don't you tell me about the wrongs of the poor. I know all about the poor. What's the matter with the poor of this country? Sangster, I'll tell you in one word. Beer, and nothing else."

Maurice attempted to deal point by point with this exordium, and, being a practiced debater with Whittaker at his fingers' ends, would no doubt very easily have laid out Mr. Gowler and danced a triumphant peroration on his prostrate body. But, unfortunately, Gowler would keep answering and interrupting—rather effectively, too—and the last infant having finished its meal, and not liking it or feeling the heat of the kitchen after so much physical exertion, would not stop howling; and the boy Gowers, having entered upon a lively dispute of their own concerning the ability of Dr. W. G. Grace to deal with Spofforth's bowling, would not be quiet, in spite of Maud's repeated instruction that they should hold their noise; therefore in such a pandemonium as this it was quite impossible for the ardent Radical to bring the artillery of his eloquence into effective operation. He gave it up, let Gowler have it as he would, and rising at last from his chair, suggested that, though they might disagree as to politics, at least they were all of one opinion as touching their dependence on God; he suggested that they should join him in prayer.

Gowler, as was usual with him, protested that he had no faith in prayer, saying that nobody knew where we came from or where we were going to, and that if a man didn't look after himself, nobody else would do it for him. But these sentiments were decidedly unpopular; and, besides, to speak truth, old Gowler rather liked to have the single gentleman holding forth in his kitchen, with all the family kneeling round the table. It gave him, in some odd way, a sense of personal importance.

Maud Gowler, who was certainly one of the worst-tempered women in the world, considered herself decidedly religious. She was Church of England and until the coming of Maurice had expressed very pointed contempt for Dissenters. On one occasion she said to him: "They're all religious in the place I'm now in—oh, terribly so! Why, they've given all the boys Bible names—Jesse, Isaac, David, Alfred, Samuel." And when Maurice corrected her and said that Alfred was not a Bible name, she had replied: "Not?—well, what about Alfred and the Cakes; that's in the Bible, isn't it?"—an answer which heightened his contempt for the Established Church. But Maud Gowler was always willing to kneel when he suggested prayer, and always spoke so fervently of his eloquence in prayer that the tolerant and eager Maurice generously forgave her this ignorance of the Bible. On the present occasion Maud said: "I feel as if someone had caught me a smack in the face, or as if I had dropped a shilling and picked up a 'appenny; so perhaps prayer will do me a bit of good; I'm sure I need it more than anyone else." And she was first down.

So they had prayer together, and Maurice prayed in a manner which he hoped might convert old Gowler from pessimism and Toryism. I am afraid the condition of poor Maud's wounded heart did not occur to him.

Alone in his own room, the zealous youth pulled a cane chair to the table in the window, buried his face in

his hands, and with the gas fizzing over his head, gave himself to a momentary despair.

Was it any use to try and alter things?

And his own fortunes. Was it possible that the Gowler household represented his true position in the world? Was it madness to dream that one day he might sit perfectly at his ease in such a room as that splendid, dignified, and luxurious apartment where Phœbe sat every afternoon of her life at tea so naturally, so naturally?

He tried to remember what he had said to her. Had he been too boastful? What would Leonard Champness say of him if she reported his views about Oxford? And Mr. Champness. Had that great man been cold, distant, patronizing? Was his manner that of displeasure and dismissal, or merely the natural manner of a much-occupied and important personage? He could not tell. He could not decide. There was nothing in Whittaker to help him here; nothing in Bohn's Library to settle this dreadful problem, where indecision was torture. And that Gowler kitchen. Their familiarity, their ease, their assumption that he was no different from them, socially and intellectually. Ah, Phœbe, Phœbe! Phœbe in the dove-colored dress, with delicate lace round her neck, a gold chain hanging over her little shoulders, the silver tray crowded with silver tea-things in front of her. Ah, Phœbe, Phœbe!—beautiful, fashionable, too ladylike Phœbe!

He slid from the chair on to his knees, and prayed with groans for the strength which can overcome the world.

V

THE value of a good manner, a cheerful disposition, and a gentlemanly taste in dress was perhaps never illustrated more strikingly than in the case of Mr. Christopher Jiggins.

Born in Clapham, the son of an inoffensive old gentleman employed in Somerset House; educated in Clapham, at a small villa residence which made a praiseworthy but pathetic effort to support the Academic brass-plate on its iron railings; and married in Clapham to the daughter of a rather seedy individual who had a shorthand connection with one of the newspapers in London—Mr. Jiggins had all the distinction of manner and all the dignity of appearance which are to be found only in the highest circles of the Circulating Library. And such was the impression he made that while the young bloods about the Stock Exchange regarded him as the best dressed man in Old Broad Street, so unemotional and practical a person as Mr. Champness had fallen a very considerable way under his spell. The great financier had so far fallen under this *ensorcellement* as to take Mr. Jiggins out of the office of a stockbroker and to install him in his own office as his own private secretary, with the very handsome salary of £500 a year; and whenever Mr. Champness was dull of an evening or wanted taking out of himself, he would send one of the maids across the road with a request to Mr. Jiggins, who lived thus conveniently near at hand, that he should drop in.

The truth is that besides being a very quick and clever fellow at his work, Christopher Jiggins in social life had all the valuable qualities of a Jack-in-the-box. Touch him definitely on the right spot, and he came out with a most surprising display of glittering good-humor; shut down the lid, and he gave no further trouble. The man's tact, his intuitive sense of the mood required of him, was remarkable. He never irritated. He never bored. He never got in the way. Mr. Champness, according to his moods or the business in hand, would call him by four distinct names, and Mr. Jiggins would answer to all four with the perfect response of a circus poodle. When Mr. Champness addressed him as "Chris," the secretary would let himself

go, taking the liberties of a court jester; when it was a case of "Christopher," he pulled in, and revealed his sympathetic, filial, and domestic nature; but when the call came to "Mr. Jiggins," the secretary was prompt, serious, and brief, a very model of dispatch; "Jiggins" shut him up completely.

Mrs. Jiggins would be invited to dine three or four times in the year; Mr. Jiggins would be commanded to drop in once or twice a week. He was invaluable.

The more absorbed Mr. Champness became in his work of finance, the less interest he found in books and newspaper. He was a man who could busy but not amuse himself. There were evenings in his life when time hung with a distinct heaviness on his hands, when Phœbe's needlework and Phœbe's gentle voice somewhat tried his nerves; and on these occasions Mr. Champness would utter the command, "Send over for Jiggins." And Jiggins, entering the room without knowing the exact mood of his master, in less than a second would have established the most sympathetic connection with that laborious and mighty mind.

At the beginning of their acquaintance, Mr. Champness had been troubled by the height of the Jiggins collar, the fancifulness of the Jiggins waistcoat, the sportiveness of the Jiggins spats, and the unmistakable influence of militarism in the cut of the Jiggins coat; but he had come to put up with and tolerate these exuberances of the taking young man, had come finally to see in them a certain seemliness, or at any rate, some degree of suitability in Jiggins, regarded as the secretary of a great financier—so completely did he depend upon Jiggins for that quickness, brightness, and amusement which he discovered to be a pleasant and healthful diversion for a dull evening.

Mr. Champness, we may say, was one of those men who in private life can only open out in the society of subordi-

nates. He had no desire to mix with his superiors, and in the company of his equals he could never be anything else but Champness the financier. With Jiggins, he could be anything he liked.

One evening, with somewhat greater haste than usual, the summons was sent across the road for Jiggins to drop in. Mr. Champness had been thoroughly put about. He had returned in his usual good spirits from the city, had exchanged in the hall his boots for his slippers as was his custom, had sat down to dinner prepared to enjoy himself, and was, if anything, more disposed to conversation than was habitual with him. And in one moment the storm came.

Phoebe mentioned that Maurice Sangster had called during the afternoon.

"What, again?" demanded Mr. Champness, opening his eyes very wide. "Why, this makes the third time in three or four weeks. The fellow seems to live here! What does it mean? He's taking a great liberty, a very great liberty indeed."

Then, without waiting for Phoebe's explanation, he gave his orders. "Tell the servants," he commanded, "that next time this person calls he is to be shown into the dining-room, not into the drawing-room. I don't want you to encourage falsehoods; you need not say that you are not at home if you are at home. Go and see him in the dining-room. Don't ask him to sit down; simply inquire his business. If this does not teach him his place, tell the servants to leave him standing in the hall, and conduct your interviews there."

Phoebe, the most dutiful of daughters, the gentlest of acquiescent natures, looked up at her father, and said with genuine surprise: "Oh, but that would be so unkind, papa!"

"Unkind!" he exclaimed, putting down his knife and

fork, with the suddenness of real surprise and real annoyance. "Unkind! I don't understand the meaning of the word in connection with a person like this. What do you mean, Phoebe? Unkind!"

"After all," said Phoebe, in her softest voice, "he comes from our home. He was a member of our church. He taught with me in the Sunday-school. He's very earnest, and very good."

"Say no more about the matter," said Mr. Champness. "Our circumstances are not his circumstances. He is not to be encouraged."

The rest of the meal passed in silence, and Mr. Jiggins was sent for immediately afterwards. Jiggins told his wife it was one of the most difficult evenings he had ever spent.

Phoebe obeyed her father, but she explained matters to Sangster. Her explanation was not wanting in loyalty to her father, and it was tactfully managed, but Sangster saw how the land lay. That interview in the dining-room precipitated matters. It brought the young people nearer to each other; it invested them both with a sense of romance; it gave Sangster his first interest in diplomacy.

He did not call again at the house, but very often he and Phoebe met in Clapham Road. They went for walks together. Sometimes they got as far as Tooting Common and Streatham before they realized how long a way they had gone. Almost unconsciously Phoebe found herself launched upon a sea of romance.

She never mentioned these meetings to her father. When her conscience upbraided her for deception, as it did very sharply at the outset, she told herself that to avoid Maurice or to be cold in her demeanor towards him would be unkind and unchristian. By the time her manner was distinctly warm and intimate, conscience had ceased to trouble

her. She hurried to her meetings with this young hero of her heart; she thought of scarcely anything else all the long day; and at night, after praying that God would bless and prosper him, she fell asleep to the most romantic dreams in which her position in the social world was unflinchingly sacrificed on the altar of love.

Maurice was careful not to make a formal profession of his feelings. He lived upon inference. His courtship was a brilliant insinuation. Once, when speaking of his work, he said to her: "The day will come when your father will not only be willing to receive me into his house, but proud to welcome me as an honored guest." She had the greatest faith in him.

A shadow of misgiving crossed his mind on one occasion when she told him that her brother Leonard was coming back from Oxford, bringing three friends with him. Maurice might despise Oxford men, but as a penniless lover he feared their power.

A week after this intimation, as Phœbe, Mr. Champness, and Christopher Jiggins were sitting in the drawing-room one evening, a servant entered the room and said that Mr. Maurice Sangster would be glad if he could speak to Mr. Champness for a few minutes.

So astounded was the financier by this announcement, that he did not observe the amazement of Phœbe. Mr. Jiggins, looking from father to daughter, noticed with interest that Phœbe's face was bent over her needlework, that she was deadly pale, that her hands were trembling.

"What on earth does the fellow want?" demanded Champness, both hands on the arms of his chair, his feet drawn in. Then, loosening his body, stretching out his legs again, and with an impatient movement of his right hand, "Tell him I'm engaged," he said curtly.

Conversation was not renewed, and Jiggins was only

just beginning to adopt another manner suitable to the ruffled feelings of his master when the servant returned. "If you please, sir," she said, "the gentleman says it's a matter of very great importance."

"Did you ever——!" Mr. Champness checked the exclamation, and turning to Christopher, said: "Here, Jiggins, just go and see what the fellow wants. Don't encourage him. He's a nuisance."

"Right, sir," exclaimed the prompt Jiggins, and without another word he was on his feet, and out of the room.

He came back in five minutes' time. "A political matter, sir," he reported; "can only be mentioned to you yourself. Infinitely confidential, I am assured by the young gentleman."

Mr. Champness considered. Mr. Jiggins glanced at Phoebe.

"A political matter," said Mr. Champness thoughtfully. "What has he got to do with politics?" Then, with a nod of understanding: "Ah, I remember; yes, he is connected in some way with the politics of the Connexion." He thought for a moment longer, rapping the fingers of one hand on the back of the other, his lips pursed, his face wrinkled with cogitation. Then he rose. "I'll go and see what he wants."

Jiggins sprang forward and opened the door.

VI

THE dining-room was not a cheerful scene of operations for the youthful diplomacy of Maurice Sangster. All its advantages were decisively on the side of Mr. Champness. The awful solemnity and the grim inhospitable arrangement of the solid mahogany furniture, the Doré pictures in gilt

frames on the gloomy red walls, the black mantelpiece, the Turkey carpet, the dull red curtains drawn across the tall windows, and particularly the one jet of gas burning at a contemptuous half-cock in the elaborate bracket over the dining-room table—these things were certainly calculated to damp the optimism and inconvenience the effrontery of any ordinary young man of humble circumstances forcing himself upon the attention of an extremely rich and formidable personage.

But Maurice Sangster was a youth of unusual courage and extraordinary resource. He entered upon the conflict not only with a determination to win, but with the conviction in his heart that if beaten now, he would assuredly live to fight another day.

Mr. Champness entered the room slowly, impressively, unwillingly. Maurice stood half-way towards the mantelpiece at the other end of the room, near the table, his hat and a roll of papers in his hand. He did not move effusively towards the great man, nor did he advance with trepidation. Depositing his hat on the table, and beginning to unroll his papers, he came immediately to the point, extending his hand confidently, bowing with just a touch of respect in the action, and saying:

“I am sorry to disturb you, Mr. Champness; but the matter which brings me is important and urgent. I have found a constituency for you. I want you to stand for Parliament. If you will allow me to say so, we could not have a better man, and you could not have a more congenial constituency.”

Mr. Champness was confounded, but he did not show a trace of surprise. He walked forward to one of the saddle-bag arm-chairs beside the hearth, and with a motion of his hand signified his pleasure that his visitor should be seated.

Maurice drew one of the smaller chairs forward, and sat down close to the great man, facing him.

"Who told you," asked Champness, "that I wanted to enter Parliament?"

"No one," answered Maurice.

"The idea has never entered my mind," said Champness.

"You surprise me," said Maurice. "I should have thought that a gentleman in your position, holding such fine views on Dissent, would have had Parliament always before his mind, not as a goal of his ambition, but as his rightful place in the country, the place where he could best serve his Church and his nation."

"The idea has never entered my mind."

"Allow me, then, to place it there, Mr. Champness."

"I am a busy man, Mr. Sangster."

"No doubt of that, but you are also a religious man; you are not the man to shirk a duty. Come, Mr. Champness, what is to become of Dissent if men like you do not represent us in Parliament? We want our great men there, our strong men, our men of wealth and power. If we are not careful, very careful, let me tell you, Rome will one day come back and take possession of this country."

"There is that danger, certainly," said Mr. Champness.

"On the one hand, Infidelity, Atheism!" cried Maurice, warming up; "on the other, Ritualism plotting with Rome. Only the Free Churches can save Protestantism in this country."

"Would you be so good as to light another gas?" asked Mr. Champness. "It is rather dull in here. The matches are on the mantelpiece."

When Maurice returned to the hearth in the greater brightness of the second gas-jet, Mr. Champness said to him: "What is your position in this matter? Will you kindly explain that to me?" He crossed his legs, brought the fingers of his hands together, and quietly studied the face of his visitor.

Maurice explained that he was organizing the political side of the Connexion; that he was in touch with almost all the contestable constituencies; that he was on terms of growing intimacy with Liberal headquarters; that he probably knew better than any man in England the political tendencies of Nonconformity; that he was in a position to introduce candidates; and that he had a very excellent machinery for fighting elections. He then spoke glowingly of the constituency in question, informed Mr. Champness that the sitting Tory member, whose majority was only ninety-seven, intended to retire, and that a Liberal candidate had not yet been adopted. He unrolled his papers, selected the necessary documents with great quickness, and read aloud certain very persuasive figures.

Mr. Champness listened, and heard the important details of this communication; but his thoughts were busy with himself. The idea had never entered his mind. Should he adopt a Parliamentary career? Should he? He was flattered by the knowledge that his position in the world entitled him to consider such a matter.

"Have you spoken about me at Liberal headquarters?" he asked.

"Not yet. I have told them that I have got the very man in my mind, and I have hinted at your position."

"My position! What do you mean by that?"

"One of our foremost Nonconformists. A man of acknowledged power in the City of London. A gentleman, an organizer, and a Liberal through and through."

"You must not exaggerate my importance, Mr. Sangster."

"I am not here to flatter you, Mr. Champness. You know your own position better than I do. It is enough for me that you are the very man for the constituency, and one of the very best representatives of advanced Nonconformity we could have in the House of Commons."

"Well, it's a big undertaking."

"Think where it will lead you. A baronetcy——"

"That does not weigh with me. Such things have no attraction for me, Mr. Sangster—*none whatever*."

"Allow me to continue—a baronetcy, a seat later on in the Cabinet, and then a peerage. These things do not weigh with you. I am glad to hear you say so. They certainly do not weigh with me. But what do these things mean for Dissent? They mean, Mr. Champness, that Dissent is taking its proper place in English life. They mean that the ascendancy of the Established Church is challenged. They mean that when we come to disestablish that Church—as very certainly we shall do—there will be men in the House of Lords to see that the Will of the People prevails. That is what they mean. Nothing to you, perhaps; but is it nothing to Nonconformity that our meetings should be presided over by Sir Humphry Champness, Baronet, and Member of Parliament? Why, it means everything. It means, at any rate, the difference between advance and stagnation. It means that Dissent is an inseparable part—and a dignified and acknowledged part—of English life. It means a blow at the Vatican—a deadly blow."

"That is one aspect, certainly," said Mr. Champness, very gravely. Then, rising from his chair, telling his visitor not to move, he walked slowly down the room, stopping to turn up the gas-jet lighted by the servant, then continuing his progress round the table till he arrived back at the hearth.

"I must think it over," he announced.

"Will you give me your answer to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"What time shall I call? At your office in the morning? It is a matter that does not admit of delay."

"Eleven o'clock. Yes, at my office."

"Thank you."

While he was rolling up his papers, the look came into Maurice's face which always announced the return of the enthusiast.

"You have promised, Mr. Champness," he said, in a very low and gentle tone of voice, "that you will think this matter over. I need not ask you, I know, to make it also a matter of prayer."

Mr. Champness inclined his head. "I shall certainly pray over it," he said.

"Forgive me," cried Maurice, taking a step forward; "but to me this seems a matter of such enormous, such overwhelming importance to the Church, that I cannot help asking you—feeling sure that God will move your heart to make the sacrifice entailed by a Parliamentary career—to allow me—oh, please forgive me—to pray with you about it now. Shall we? Here and now? Shall we ask God together to guide you aright?"

It was long since such a proposal had been made to the financier. It took him back to older and simpler times. It took him back to his father's house; it took him back to his own youth; it took him back to the first years of his own home in Derby when his wife was alive, and his children were children.

"Certainly," he replied, "certainly."

"Will you pray, or shall I?" asked Maurice.

"You," said Champness.

They knelt together, Mr. Champness at the little chair, and Maurice at the table.

When they rose from their knees, Mr. Champness put his hand on the young man's shoulder, and without looking at him said: "I thank you—I thank you."

Then he led the way down the room.

At the front door he said: "You must come and see us some evening."

VII

THE day had come when Leonard Champness was to return from Oxford, bringing three of his friends with him. Maurice was restless and shaky.

His relations with Mr. Champness had improved; but only one invitation to visit the house had been given to him since that morning when the financier delivered negative judgment touching the Parliamentary proposal, softening the blow with a check for a hundred guineas, which he hoped might be useful to the funds of Maurice's organization. With the best disposition to do so, Maurice could not really assure himself that Mr. Champness was friendly. He could not convince himself that he had been a success at the dinner-table on the occasion of his visit. Jiggins had been there, and the mood of Mr. Champness being a cheerful one, Jiggins had been called "Chris" with considerable success. He had told amusing stories, he had given inimitable accounts of diverting adventures; he had been extremely interesting, well-informed, distinguished. The wonderful urbanity and dazzling wit of Jiggins had made Maurice awkward and dull. He realized then what was meant by a scintillating manner. No; he had not been a success. He told himself that he was too much in earnest for table-talk and the chatter of polite society.

And now Leonard was returning, with Oxford men.

Maurice worked exceedingly hard at his office all the morning, gave only ten minutes to his luncheon, and having gleaned from Phœbe the information that Leonard would arrive at four o'clock, set off for Clapham at a quarter-past three. He felt he could not rest until he had seen those Oxford men.

He walked up and down on the opposite side of the road

for nearly half an hour. At the end of that time a small railway omnibus, piled with baggage on the top, made its appearance in the distance. Maurice felt his blood turn cold. The luggage had a rollicking appearance. He felt that the three Oxford men inside were all Jiggenses, only younger, gayer, handsomer, richer, and more dandily attired.

He hurried forward to meet the bus, and shot across the road just before he was level with it. He glanced up as it passed, and caught a sight of straw hats, which unnerved him. He walked on for a few paces in the same direction, then wheeled round as if he had forgotten something, and followed the bus. A girl's school coming towards him processionally obscured his vision. He saw the bus-door open, saw four young men blunder out of it, saw them indistinctly congregate together on the pavement, and then saw them move away in a knot to the drive-gate. He increased his speed, and passed the house just when the coachman, with shelving shoulders and dragging arms, was crossing his path with some of the luggage in his hands. This gave him a moment's excuse to stop and look up the drive. The front-door was open. The straw hats were bobbing off, and Phœbe, delightfully arrayed in white, was standing in the midst of the Oxford men, smiling.

It was not that he thought her false or coquettishly minded; it was because he dreaded the influence of those terrible Oxford men that he hastened away with beating heart, pale face, and a bitter taste in his soul. After a week in their society, what would she think of him? Would they so corrupt and spoil her exquisite nature that she would come to detect in him provincialisms which till now had eluded her observation? Would their frivolous conversation breed in her dawning intelligence a contempt for enthusiasm, antipathy to ideals? He did not fear that she

would fall in love with these men—that was a thought he dared not contemplate—but he did fear the contagion of swaggering and lounging young men full of their own conceits, and listless with the boredom of University tradition.

These men, too, might influence Mr. Champness, might make him less disposed than ever to entertain a newsagent's son from Derby. There was no telling where the Oxford corruption might stop. Suppose they made a Churchman and Tory of Mr. Champness, carried him off to Belgravia, introduced him to dukes and duchesses, set his feet on the broad way of social aggrandizement which leads to spiritual destruction!

Unhappy Maurice! As he paced hot-foot back to London, he hated aristocracy with an immense and burning hatred. He imagined himself to be standing on a platform before a vast audience of working men; he made a speech to them about the sins of Society, as he walked quicker and quicker on his way; he was so caught up by the corrosive character of his invective, so carried away by the heat and passion of his imaginary eloquence, that he forgot Champness, forgot Phoebe, forgot the Oxford men in straw hats, and began to speak out loud, swinging his arms, his face working with the fervor of this indignant, scornful, and superb oratory.

Before he quite realized the fact, he found himself at the iron gate of Gowler's house. He opened it, walked up the steps, and came face to face with Maud, lounging in the doorway.

"Hullo!" she drawled, without shifting her position. "Don't look as if you'd seen a ghost. I shan't bite you."

He was struck by her woebegone appearance.

"What's the matter?" he inquired.

"Oh, I don't know," she answered drearily, bitterly, impatiently.

"Something is troubling you?"

"I know that. Thank you all the same for telling me."

"What is it? Can I do anything?"

"No, thanks. I think I'd better go and drown myself; that would be the quickest way out. Shouldn't I make a pretty corpse? Fancy me coming out of the river with a fish-hook in my waist-belt, and all my hair hanging, same as a mermaid's! Wouldn't you laugh?"

"Miss Gowler," he said, "don't speak of such a horrible thing. It's wrong; it's wicked. God loves you. You know that."

"Does He? Well, if He does, nobody else don't. I'm not wanted, anyway. A fool with sore eyes could see that. Other girls make friends. I don't. I'm one of the unwanted, I am. A little bit of overweight, that's what I am. What's the good of living if people don't care about you?"

He was so moved with pity that he forgot all his own sorrows, and, laying a hand very tenderly on her arm, he poured out upon her the whole forces of his eloquent compassion. He begged her to know that other hearts were either broken or transfixed with the spear of grief; that these suffering hearts endured because they had faith in God, because they made adversity a ladder to heaven instead of a rock crushing them to earth. He implored Miss Gowler to surrender herself to the discipline of sorrow, and look through those whirling mists of scorching fire which now lacerated her bosom into the golden glories of an everlasting Kingdom shining with light and ringing with hosannahs.

When he came to an end, she said, looking at him with a sad admiration: "You can speak, can't you? I think if I was to hear you going on like that every day I might shake it off, and go to church regular, and read the Bible, and say my prayers. But you're too busy to bother about

me. Never mind. I shall do. My heart isn't broken—at least, not that I know of—it's only had a knock. That's what some girls' hearts are made for—just to get a knock. Funny thing, life is."

He offered further comfort.

"Oh, it's all right," she said. Then, drawing herself away: "Here, you be careful!" she said. "If anyone was to see you now, they'd think you was trying to kiss me. Oh, lor! wouldn't that be a scandal! I'm going downstairs now. No, I think I'll do a bit of a mooch. Penny ride on a tramcar down to Victoria Park—that's what I want. It's no good sitting about in a chair, moping about the past, dreaming of days gone by, and bringing things up in conversation. Well, au revoir. Don't be frightened. I shan't do Miss Beckwith in the Thames this time."

Maurice ascended to his room, waited to give Maud Gowler time to get out of his way, and then descended once more to the street and made for his office as fast as he could go.

When he arrived there, the office-boy informed him that Dr. Mundy had called, and would return in a few minutes. Dr. Mundy was the chairman of his Fund—one of the most popular ministers of the Connexion, a tremendous politician, and a central figure in Free Church circles. Maurice admired him, and liked him. He looked up to him with a very great respect. No minister in London had made so deep an impression upon him, and it was largely by this man's influence that he held his present position.

He went into the little room assigned to him by the Connexion for organizing the political forces of Nonconformity, and sat down at a table that was covered with letters and papers and manuscripts. He began to go through these papers rather nervously, blaming himself for having gone out of his way to the Gowlers'. Suppose

Dr. Mundy dismissed him, suppose Phœbe became engaged to one of those Oxford men—would the consolation he had just offered so easily to Maud Gowler preserve his faith and enable him to face the world? Would it? He shuddered, and offered a silent prayer to Heaven.

His heart beat nervously at the sound of Dr. Mundy's voice outside. He rose from his chair, a paper twitching in his fingers, and said jerkily as the door opened: "I am extremely sorry, sir, that I was out when you first came."

"My dear fellow, don't let that trouble you for a minute!" exclaimed the benignant doctor. He shook Maurice's hand very heartily, glanced at him shrewdly through his spectacles, drew a chair to the table, and sat down with the briskness, eagerness, and alacrity that was so characteristic of his high-spirited and happy life.

"Sangster," he said, leaning well forward, and folding his hands on the table, "I want you to start to-night for Bursby. There's a chance there for us—something very big, something new. Let me tell you."

His eyebrows, which were bushy and of a lighter brown than his plentiful hair, came down in sudden concentration over his eyes, the forehead contorted itself into deep wrinkles, his bearded chin projected, and the small eyes glittered like black spots behind their spectacles.

"There's going to be trouble in Bursby. A strike of the workmen—a big strike. Their wages are small; the conditions of their employment are scandalous; their houses are abominable. At present the town is Church and Tory. But we've got a man there who is a prince of men, one of the finest fellows living, a great, strong, perfectly glorious fellow in the Reverend Reuben Scarffe. Do you know him? Well, you soon will, and you'll like him. He tells me that no town in England offers us a better chance to prove, what we must prove if we are not to perish, that"—here he

rapped Maurice's table with one of his hands—"that the politics of the Free Churches are the politics of democracy, the politics of the people, *not* the politics of the comfortable middle classes. I've often told you that our strategy is not to get the Liberal Party to patronize us, but to make the Liberal Party do what we tell it. I've also told you that our future will lie more and more with the working classes. We must inspire the working men, Sangster, with our ideals, and then organize them as the grand army of progress and enlightenment. Well, we talk about these things, and we don't do them. We are regarded by everybody as the politicians of the small tradesman and the small business man. It won't do! And now, here's a great chance to prove what we really are. My suggestion is: Go as quick as train will take you to Bursby. Mr. Scarffe will put you up. Study the position thoroughly; make yourself perfectly acquainted with the economic conditions of the town; discuss the political aspects of the case with the workmen themselves; enter into a friendly and informal consultation with the Liberal agent; and then let me know whether a Nonconformist, running as a Nonconformist and a Democrat, would stand a chance of winning the seat. If so, I can put my hand on the man—a workman of unusual intelligence and the most scrupulous honor. The thing for you to do, Sangster, is to prepare the way, to be the forerunner and herald of this revolution. It is a great chance for you. Now go, like a good fellow, and do your best."

Relieved to find that he still stood in the good graces of Dr. Mundy, but rather depressed by leaving Phœbe alone at a time when she so sorely needed his sympathy to counteract the influence of Oxford, Maurice finished his work at the office, consulted a time-table, dispatched a telegram to Bursby, and hurried back to Lambeth to pack his bag.

VIII

IF Maurice had seen the Oxford men before his departure he might have set out upon that eventful journey to the North with a heart infinitely freer from the discomfortable pangs of jealousy.

Leonard Champness and his three friends were serious students, and the marks of serious study were so visibly written upon their brows that no one in his right senses could possibly have supposed them capable of corrupting youth and innocence, might even have doubted their capacity to inspire a tender affection in the least exigent of spinsters. In spite of the deceptive straw hats of which Maurice had caught only a distracted glance, and in spite of the rollicking look of the luggage on top of the omnibus, these four students of Oxford presented some such distinct and mirth-moving an appearance as occasionally may be seen of a winter evening in a village schoolroom, when four very rustic and lugubrious gentlemen, calling themselves a "quartet party," shuffle awkwardly and unwillingly—keeping very close together for company—into the terrifying glare of publicity.

The scholarly son of the financier, for instance, had the look of a young man who is too big for his coats and too tall for his trousers. The expression of his eyes was one of fixed and unending inquiry; he looked as if he were staring through his spectacles into a boundless perspective of insoluble perplexity. This expression of the eyes, which was assisted by the pout of his lips, by the tuft of stubborn hair which stuck out of the back of his head, by the concentration of the eyebrows towards the point where his spectacles crossed the bridge of his nose, gave him a decidedly mournful and depressing appearance. The fact,

too, that his nose had apparently experienced no little difficulty in growing up, and still retained something of the brevity and tilt which are so pleasant and characteristic of infancy, tended to confirm in thoughtless and unobservant people the impression that he was dull in his wits.

His friends were less demented in appearance, but they were all equally untidy and equally serious. When they unbent, as even the most serious unbend at certain times, they could quote the verses of Matthew Prior and Calverley, the wit of Lewis Carroll, the bitter epigrams of the Greek anthology, or some preposterous exaggeration of Mark Twain—over which they would laugh consumedly. On the occasions when Nature moved them to sportiveness, they would go into the garden, station themselves at different points of the lawn, and toss a soft ball to each other, beginning slowly, increasing the speed as they gradually lessened the distance between them, and laughing very heartily when at last someone failed to effect a catch, and the ball bounced into a flower-bed.

Their alternations between lounging idleness and immense activity rather puzzled the financier. Mr. Champness himself went like a clock; he walked up and down stairs always at the same pace, he sat down to his meals exactly as he sat down to his office table, he never lounged, and he never hurried. His habits were as fixed as the calendar, his dignity as everlasting as the hills. But these young men at one moment would be sprawling about on sofas and chairs, yawning their heads off, and at the next would be walking into London at fiery speed to interview the British Museum or reconstruct the history of Westminster Abbey. They would seem on some occasions as if an earthquake could not move them from their pottering and dawdling indolence; and yet, in a minute, they would spring to their feet, rush up the stairs like seamen going aloft, and descend

before you could say Jack Robinson in the manner of Niagara, ready to start for a walk into the country or an expedition to the Tower of London.

It was only this extraordinary transition from the very extremity of laggard pandiculation to a quite bewildering exhibition of furious activity which troubled the great financier in his character as host. He liked to have the young men in his house. For one thing, they treated him with considerable respect, and entirely did away with his original misgiving that perhaps they would discover his ignorance of intellectual matters, and so ignore him at his own table. But quite apart from this, old Mr. Champness—and he was not very old either—liked the feeling of company, scholarship, and sober good spirits which the young men brought into his quiet house. He found it interesting to sit in his chair after dinner listening to the disputation of the young men, occasionally putting in a brief sententious word of his own, but only when he was perfectly sure of his facts. He liked to hear their accounts of the places they had visited in the day. He liked to know that while he had been busy in the City they had not been idle. He liked to feel as he came homeward that the house would not be silent when he opened the door, and that there would be no necessity to send across the road for Mr. Christopher Jiggins.

It speaks eloquently for the state of his disposition towards these four young men that he was only slightly troubled when he made the discovery that one of Leonard's friends was the son of an Anglican clergyman, and that none of them was a Nonconformist. As eloquently, too, perhaps more eloquently, it speaks to this benevolence in his nature that he was only momentarily startled when he found that Leonard and his friends were in the habit of going to theaters. As for their horrible pipes and clouds of tobacco-smoke filling his dining-room after breakfast and

dinner, while Mr. Champness disapproved, he said nothing at all in objection. London had broadened his mind. While he retained all his original scruples, while he clung tenaciously to the traditions he had inherited and the judgments he had formed for himself in his early manhood at Derby, he was less disposed to censure other men for holding contrary opinions.

So it came about that Leonard's friends, all of whom had their homes in the provinces, were pressed to prolong their visit, and for many weeks they remained as the guests of Mr. Champness in Clapham, using his house as the base of their operations in an historical exploration of London which was at once catholic and discriminating.

If Mr. Champness liked the young men we may be sure that Phœbe liked them, too. And as they took her with them on some of their expeditions, particularly to such places as Madame Tussaud's Exhibition, the Royal Aquarium, the Crystal Palace, the Polytechnic in Regent Street, and the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, her life might be described at this time, if we bring it into comparison with the monotony of her former existence, as a veritable whirl.

And yet Phœbe was not happy; indeed, she was far from happy. The sympathetic reader will not need to be told the cause of this unhappiness. It arose, of course, from the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Maurice Sangster. He had vanished from her life, and had not uttered or written one word of explanation. When she was shopping, when she was paying the books, when she was going to chapel or meeting, she looked to right and left of her, hoping for a sight of her hero; but all in vain. The Royal Aquarium might soothe her misgiving, the Polytechnic in Regent Street might mitigate her anxiety, but nothing could permanently shake the conviction from her heart that either Maurice had abandoned her or something very

dreadful had happened to the impulsive and earnest young man.

One night she was sitting rather dejectedly at dinner when the animation of the voices at the table gradually broke in upon her abstraction with the intimation that something out of the usual was under discussion. She had just roused herself, and was just beginning to understand that something to do with the working classes was the subject of this lively debate, when the friend of Leonard, who was sitting next to her, turned and put the puzzling question:

"Have you read it yet, Miss Champness?"

She smiled and shook her head.

"You really must," said the young man. "The papers to-night are full of it. There's a regular scream over it in the *Pall Mall Gazette* leading article."

"What is it?" she asked, leaning forward and affecting interest.

"Oh, you haven't heard? Well, in the *London Herald* this morning there's a three-column article describing the life of a manufacturing town in the North of England. It's the first of a series. The state of things it exposes is something too frightful for words. Of course, it's only journalism, and the tone of the thing is rather vulgar and hysterical, but if even only half of what it says is true the condition is perfectly appalling. Your father is inclined to think the article is much too exaggerated, and takes the view that it is dangerous to write in such an inflammatory style of grievances which may be modified, but which can never be permanently removed."

With this the young man turned to hear what the others were saying, and poor Phoebe sank once more into her state of abstraction.

The discussion was something of a duel between Mr. Champness, who spoke with great weight as a capitalist,

and one of the Oxford men, the clergyman's son, who spoke with no little spirit as a Socialist. Every now and then Leonard would put in a wise word which told on his father's side.

So interesting was this discussion that Mr. Champness did not retire to the drawing-room when dinner was finished and the Oxford men produced their pipes from their pockets. He and Phœbe remained in an atmosphere of tobacco-smoke, she listening with a gradually increasing interest—for the young Socialist reminded her in his views of the vanished Maurice—he speaking with greater effect in the consciousness that his argument was prevailing very powerfully.

The door opened, and a servant entered the room. She went to the side of Mr. Champness, stood there till he had finished what he was saying, and then, stooping a little, announced that Mr. Maurice Sangster would be glad if he might see Mr. Champness for a few minutes on very urgent and important business.

Mr. Champness considered for a moment, and then said, with quite a welcome in the tone of his voice: "Ask him if he will come in."

Maurice entered the room as if he was off to catch a train. He shook hands with everybody as if he was saying good-by. He sat down at the table as if he was about to write a telegram.

But he squeezed Phœbe's hand so very reassuringly, he looked so heroic and triumphant and happy, that she could have sung for joy, almost have cried for the sudden transition of her feelings.

"We were discussing a matter, Mr. Sangster, that will interest you, I think," said old Champness, looking at the young man and remembering how they had once prayed together in that very room.

"Indeed?"

"The article which appeared this morning in the *London Herald*."

"Ah, I shall be glad to hear your opinion about that," said Maurice, drawing his chair closer to the table. "I am interested, particularly interested. I know the town, and I know the man who is writing the series of articles."

"Really?"

"In fact"—looking round the table—"if I may tell a secret, I am myself the writer of the article."

Phœbe's heart leaped with joy. Oh, why, why had she not listened more earnestly to what was being said? She looked at Maurice with pride in her eyes. For a moment he flashed at her a look which said, "All is well; don't worry; I have conquered"; then he turned quickly to Mr. Champness, who was saying:

"I think you would be well advised to moderate the tone of the succeeding articles."

IX

WHEN Maurice Sangster arrived in Bursby and had greeted the Rev. Reuben Scarffe, he suggested to that excellent man, being in a fervid state of mind, and determined to distinguish himself in the political mission and so win the hand of Phœbe Champness, that they should open proceedings and sanctify their discussion with prayer. So far as I am able to discover, this was the last time in his wonderful career that such a proposition was made by Mr. Sangster. One may say that it was from the very moment when Mr. Scarffe told him to sit down and listen to good sound horse sense, instead of pretending to address the Almighty in order that he might preach at him, Reuben Scarffe, that Maurice Sangster entered upon the second phase of his eventful career.

With Reuben Scarffe Maurice lived the first week of his stay in Bursby rather uncomfortably. At the end of the first week he began to like him, and by the end of the second week he really loved him. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that before the third week had passed if there was one man living for whom Maurice would have gone cheerfully to the rack, given his thumbs to the screw, laid his head upon the block, or offered his breast to the bullets of an outraged authority in scarlet tunic and brass buttons, that man was Reuben Scarffe.

In appearance Mr. Scarffe was only attractive at a second glance. He was short in the leg, heavy in the body, and his head looked as if it had caught in infancy a very sharp and complicated attack of water on the brain. Bald on the top of his high and swollen forehead, clean-shaven from ear to ear, and afflicted with a pale and yellowish complexion which lacked the finish of a black and radiant pigtail to give it atmosphere, his face presented at a first and hasty inspection only the uncomfortable appearance of a half-baked loaf. But on looking more closely into this soft and pulp-like mass of face, one discovered that the little slits of green eyes were overflowing with shrewdness, that the long, unwieldy, and apparently boneless nose was indicative of considerable humor, and that the great flexible mouth, bulging up the cheeks and shutting the eyes, when it expanded to its full smile, expressed the most engaging and contagious good-nature. In short, one could not look at Reuben Scarffe a second time without discovering that he was something of a character, and without the feeling that it would be a comparatively easy business to contract for this whimsical, awkward, and untidy little creature a real and generous liking.

How he came to influence Maurice Sangster may be told in a few words. He began by tearing up all the traditional and inherited notions which clothed the young man's

life, asking him at the conclusion of this disrobing what he really was—what his unclothed and stark-naked soul definitely knew about the mysteries of the universe; he then proceeded to inform the cold and shivering soul of the young gentleman that Dissent was not a religion, and that other churches beside his own were sincerely attempting to serve God. From this he went to the great test of their Maker, and asked Maurice how many hungry people he had fed, to how many thirsty people had he given drink, how many naked people he had clothed, how many sick people and people in prisons he had visited—not, of course, during the whole course of his life, but in the last week or two—if he liked it better, yesterday and the day before.

When Maurice made no answer, Reuben Scarffe had laughed, clapped him on the shoulder, and had said to him: “Lad, you pray too much and work too little. You’ve inherited a bad idea. Get rid of it. See this, now; you have spent most of your life between praying to God, asking Him to do what you want Him to do, that, and calling other people—your fellow-Christians, mark you—hard names. Your work, lad, has not been a hunger and thirst to bring heaven on the earth, but a bad-tempered effort to kick off the earth a church or two that you don’t take to, that you don’t like. You don’t want to make the country a Christian country, and that is not what you’re out for—you want to get the Tories down and the Liberals on top. Call yourself a Christian? No, lad! You’re nothing but a political dissenter, and shallow at that. You don’t know what poverty, real poverty, is; you don’t know what factory servitude can do with the bodies and the souls of men, women, and children; you don’t know what life in a slum means, what the public-house means, what temptation means. I’m going to show you these things. Instead of the words and the names, I’m going to show you the things

themselves. You've been looking for life in a dictionary, for God in a chapel; I'm going to show you both life and God in the streets of Bursby. And when you've seen what I've got to show you, you'll forget, lad, all about the Pope and the Ritualists, all about old Dizzy and old Gladstone, perhaps you'll forget about the chapel, the prayer-meeting, and the Doctrines of entire sanctification; you'll have just one want in your heart, and that will be to get Christ into political economy, Christ into the House of Commons, and Christ into the daily life of unhappy people. When you have got that wish, lad, really got it, you won't have to go farther than your own heart to find what everybody needs before he can be a Christian."

Maurice had resented this vigorous instruction; he resented it at first coldly, and, as Scarffe got more and more the better of him in argument, hotly, indignantly. Perhaps he might have rallied his intellectuality, made a great fight for the ancient traditions which held him in bondage, and stuck to his prejudices to his life's end, if the controversy had ended in the study of Mr. Scarffe. But day after day the energetic minister had carried Maurice into the streets of the town, taken him into the homes of poor people, made him sit in the Radical Club with intelligent Trades Unionists and Socialists, brought him face to face with Labor in its lair and ultimate dog-hole, shown him poverty on its last leg, sickness in its darkest and dampest corner, human life in its fullest extremity of want, misery, and despair.

For the first time Maurice looked Labor in the face. Hitherto he had been disposed to regard the multitudinary masses of England as ignorant, improvident, drunken, and disreputable. For the working man who came to chapel and prayer-meetings, he had the friendly patronage of a small tradesman; for the working man who had a vote, and could be trusted to give the vote to the enemies of

Church and landlord, he had a feeling of distant admiration. But now he came face to face with Labor itself—the unnatural Labor of civilization, Labor divided from pure air, green fields, and the company of birds and beasts; Labor herded into settlements of squalor and poverty; Labor worse housed, worse fed, worse clothed, and worse tended than lunatics in the county asylum, prisoners in the county jail, and rogues and vagabonds in the Union workhouse; Labor that hated its toil and was at enmity with the social order.

“Bursby is a town,” said Scarffe, “that knocks humbug out of a man quicker than any other town I know. We’re all poor; we all live in the same kind of dirty red box with a slate top over our heads; we all have to work for our living; we all breathe the same air of factory-smoke and railway coal-dust; and we haven’t got a public park or an open space from one end of the place to the other. We know what hunger means, what it means to be cold in winter, we know what sickness and unemployment mean, we know what an extra baby costs to feed, and what the undertaker charges to bury one of our worn-out bodies; but we don’t know what philosophy and theology are worrying their heads about, nor what good ever comes of battles between Tory and Whig, nor what advantage comes from science, nor what pleasure comes from art, nor what glory comes from empire; those things, lad, don’t travel to Bursby!”

And Maurice—they had just visited a house filled with a white-faced, stunted family, a family described by Scarffe as having “rickety ribs, knock-knees, tuberculous lungs, chalky teeth, and weak eyes, all the lot, all the whole consumptive lot of them”—had replied: “But it will take a revolution to alter these things.” To which Scarffe made answer: “But isn’t a revolution the very thing we want, the very thing we ought to fight for? Why, lad, that’s the

only thing we long and pray for in Bursby—a revolution. Come, you aren't a tinkerer, are you?"

One night as they sat together Maurice said to Scarffe, that if he had known what he knew now, when he was a journalist in Derby, he might have written something that would have startled mankind.

"Lad, you're not very old yet," replied Scarffe. "Begin now. Write what you've seen, tell what you've heard, and warn London that a strike is coming this autumn which will spread till it bursts something. That's just what we want, articles in the papers. People don't know. Why, Sangster, lad, do you suppose if people *knew* what you know now they'd still do nothing? No; men and women, when all's said and done, are not laughing devils."

Maurice felt very much inclined to write. To tell the truth, he had gone to sleep on the last two nights composing a tremendous indictment of society which brought him with surprising swiftness into close and intimate acquaintance with Mr. Gladstone, Mr. John Morley, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, and the editors of the chief London newspapers.

"I will!" he exclaimed. "At least, I'll try. Scarffe, I believe I can do something rather good. But you must help. And when it's finished I'll send it to Dr. Mundy. He'll get it in the quarterly magazine. We'll fire the Church."

Scarffe replied: "Write your article. I'll see about getting it printed."

And when it was written, and when Scarffe had curtailed it here, expanded it there, and dropped in two or three stories calculated to freeze the blood of comfortable humanity, this great article, described as the first of the series, was dispatched to the editor of the daily *London Herald*.

"I have often told you," wrote Scarffe to his friend the editor, "that you ought to send down one of your best

special correspondents to Bursby. You haven't done so. And now I show you what an amateur can do. Publish these articles, but don't publish the writer's name. He's young, it might turn his head, and properly handled he'll do something useful."

In sending a proof of the article the editor had told Scarffe that not one of his special correspondents could have written such an amazingly good account of an industrial town. He asked him to tell Maurice Sangster that he would be glad to see him when he returned to London. In a postscript he said: "I am trusting to you to justify the facts mentioned in the article, which seem to me perhaps a trifle exaggerated."

That was how the first article came to be written. Maurice wrote five more articles before he left Bursby, and he arrived in London on the day that saw the publication of the first.

Before we proceed to tell how he fared at the dinner-table of Mr. Champness, we must relate that on arriving in London he went at once to his office, reported fully to Dr. Mundy, and then hastened back to his Lambeth lodgings in order to change his clothes before paying a visit to the financier.

It was like the jade that everybody who knows anything of the ups and downs of life assures us she undoubtedly is, that Fortune, just as Mr. Maurice Sangster was beginning to feel the primroses beneath his feet on this day of a veritable triumph—for the evening newspapers were all talking of his article—should have turned on the tap of mortification, chagrin, and positive humiliation in the person of Mr. Gowler.

"Ha!" exclaimed Gowler, meeting Sangster in the passage, and standing between lodger and staircase in a manner that was unmistakably aggressive. "It's about time, I think, that you did return. I've been wanting a word with you,

Sangster, ever since I came home one night and found you had flitted into an alibi."

"What do you mean?" demanded Maurice, who was rather more manly than when he departed.

"Mean!" exclaimed Gowler, shaking the ashes from his pipe with a jerk of his right hand; "why, I mean a word about you and my daughter, Miss Maud Gowler. That's what I mean, Sangster."

"I don't understand you."

"But I mean to understand you before I've done with you," answered Gowler, fumbling in his waistcoat pocket for a box of matches, while he continued to shake the ashes from his pipe with the other hand. "Making my daughter's name a byword!" he exclaimed wrathfully; "using my own front doorstep for your carryings on; setting all the neighbors talking in a manner that might very well get me and Mrs. Gowler and the children turned out of our house; and then—doing a bunk, skedaddling, hiding away till you thought it had blown over! No, Sangster, no! It ain't blown over; it ain't going to blow over. I'm a man who can look after his children, and look after Miss Gowler, who is at a dangerous time of life, and a fetching girl, too, as everybody very well knows, I will—certainly I will. If you see green in my eye, tell me; I shall be glad to know about it."

At this point Maurice interrupted the old man. "I have no time to waste," he said. "Kindly say what you have to say quickly. At present you are talking nonsense, so far as I am concerned. What is it you want to say?"

Taken aback by this wholly unexpected attack, Gowler lit his pipe, looked through the smoke at Maurice as he did so, and said at last, carrying the stump of the match with elaborate precaution to a battered old hatstand, and dropping it with exceeding caution into the tin tray: "I'm not talking nonsense, Mr. Sangster; I'm appealing to your sense

of decency as an English gentleman and a Christian young man. Now, I ask you: Did you, or did you not, on the evening of Toosday, the 5th ult., put your arm round Miss Gowler's waist, draw her to you—mark that, *draw her to you*—and make as if you would kiss her behind the ear? Now, did you, or did you not?"

"Most certainly not," ejaculated Maurice, very indignant and scornful.

"And, further," demanded old Gowler, "was the assault delivered on the front doorstep in full view of opposite windows at a time when the blinds were up and there was light enough to see across the street?"

"The whole thing is too absurd for discussion!" cried Maurice.

"And, further," continued old Gowler, "when Miss Gowler repulsed you, and ran away to escape from you, did you go upstairs for a minute, and then come down quick, bolt down the street, and do your best to track her?"

"I will hear no more. You are ludicrously absurd. Ask Miss Gowler."

"Now, excuse me, Mr. Sangster, excuse me—but that's mean. I don't think as ever I heard a meaner thing said than that. *Ask Miss Gowler!* What! Ask the girl who loves you, who would perjure herself to save you an hour's anguish, who is breaking her heart for you now at this very minute? No! No!" He put his pipe into his mouth, and said softly: "My poor little Maud! No! I shan't ask her."

"Then my answer is this," answered Maurice. "I have never attempted to embrace Miss Gowler, and I never shall—neither on your front doorstep nor in your back parlor. I am not a villain. I am not a fool. If you scruple to ask Miss Gowler for her version of your libelous story you must accept mine. Here it is: the story is grotesque, absurd, scandalous, unworthy of a moment's consideration."

"Well, Sangster," said old Gowler, very meekly, laying

a hand on the lodger's arm, and attempting his most ingratiating manner, "I must say that I am very glad to hear you say so. I couldn't believe it of you. I know you admire Maud. I know that as a single gentleman living in lodgings it must be a fiery temptation to have the opportunities as you have enjoyed of indulging yourself in her society. And, Sangster, life has taught me that all men are vulnerable where women are concerned—all men. I don't believe the man has ever lived who could be in the society of a good-looking and respectable young lady like our Maud without wanting to taste the sweets of what you may call a connubial intimacy. But I couldn't bear to think that you had indulged yourself in such a manner out of sheer wickedness and deceiving cruelty. I told her so. I told the neighbors so. I said Sangster is religious, I said Sangster isn't one of your foxy butter-haired hypocrites, and I said Sangster has paid his rent regularly, and behaved himself always in my house like a gentleman, and I won't believe it of him; I said *I won't believe it of him.*"

At this point Maurice said to the old man: "I am late already for an important appointment. When I return I will speak to you again of this matter. But pray put out of your head any idea that I am a victim of Miss Gowler's attractions. As a matter of fact, I am, practically speaking, already engaged."

"Oh," said old Gowler, blinking his eyes—"oh, so that's it, is it?" He moved out of Maurice's way. "Well, then," he grumbled, "we needn't say no more about the matter. Life's full of mistakes. I hope the one as you have made won't land you into indigestion and the bankruptcy court. Can she cook, this girl of yours?" And with that, pulling at the extinct ashes at the bottom of his pipe, the old fellow shuffled off in his carpet slippers to the basement head.

"By the way," he said, coming to a stop and turning his head to shout up the stairs, "Maud's back."

X

"TELL me, did your father say anything about me after I had left?"

Phœbe was walking on air in the neighborhood of Clapham Common, her eyes dazzled by more sunlight than came from the sky. "He praised you," she said. "They all praised you; they said your descriptions were wonderful."

Maurice smiled. "But didn't your father say anything about my politics? Isn't he afraid how far I shall go? He gave me that impression."

"He said that you might be dangerous," Phœbe admitted a little unwillingly. "And Leonard said that sentiment ought not to be mixed up with politics. But they all agreed that your article was splendid, and that what you told them about the poor people in Bursby was terrible—more impressive, they said, than the article itself. And at breakfast this morning one of Leonard's friends—he's a clergyman's son and a Socialist—read the second article aloud, and they all praised it very much indeed."

"But your father; did he speak of me myself? How does he strike you in his attitude towards me?"

"I think he said that you would be very dangerous unless someone controlled you," Phœbe replied. She turned and smiled at him to soften the blow of this communication. How exalted, how heroic he looked!

"Someone to control me!" exclaimed Maurice scornfully. "But no one shall ever control me. I won't be ruled. I won't be bought. No man shall make me either the hack of the Liberal Party or the fawning lackey of Capital. No! I intend to be free. I intend to speak the truth. I intend to live for the people, and to work for the revolution that will tear Society up by the roots. No one shall control me, except God and the woman I love."

She had been a little frightened till he came to the end of his passionate speech, but at the end of it she flushed to the roots of her hair, a mist of heat surged to her eyes, and a bird of uncommonly gorgeous plumage, with a note unmatched in the groves of Arcady, started to sing at top-speed in her little fluttering heart. Oh, she could scarce walk for ecstasy!

She dared not look at him. But he, glancing at her, saw that the battle was won already, won definitely, decisively, unalterably. It was now only a question of taking peaceful possession of conquered territory.

How charming she looked! how soft, tender, timorous! how exquisitely pliant and sweet! What distinction in her dress! How lady-like, how gracious, how refined! Perhaps innocence and purity were the distinguishing characteristics of her beauty; but who could look at her and not feel the bewitchment of her patrician style and manner? If old Gowler could see her, how he would stare! One might almost say that Maurice was in love with the lady's veil, the tulle round her neck, the light muff which she gently held at her waist, and the blush roses in her hat.

"Miss Phœbe," he said to her, "I called upon your father last night to ask him if he would subscribe to a special fund we are raising to run a working-man candidate for Bursby. He is thinking the matter over; it is a new idea, and it takes time for old-fashioned Liberals to adjust their minds to such a revolutionary change. There is another question I shall have to ask him, if you will give me your permission to do so, and one that I fear may disturb him more than the political question. For it will touch his own life. It will touch his pride and his social position. It will touch his heart. It is concerning this second question, if you will allow me to do so, that I should like to sound you."

Phœbe dared not speak. She could scarcely hear what Maurice was saying for the noise made in her heart by the

bird of gorgeous plumage now singing as if he were trying to overtake the Flying Dutchman. As for the pavements of the south side of Clapham Common, they were like a spring mattress, or like the great aerial net over which Zagel had run in the Royal Aquarium after being shot out of a cannon to the crash of the cymbals and the rattle of all the orchestra. Phœbe, of course, had never been tipsy in her life, but from this moment she could never truthfully deny that she had experienced some of the milder sensations of intoxication.

Maurice ventured to put his hand to her arm just below the elbow. She trembled in every limb. The earth jumped and zigzagged like a magic-lantern slide that won't go perfectly into the socket.

"Shall we cross the road?" he asked, and led her gently to the other side in a silence that had all the lighter qualities of chloroform, laughing-gas, and the bottled energies of the Widow Clicquot.

"How jolly the Common looks this morning!" he exclaimed, the hand still at her arm. He felt that she was as clay in his hands. Not like a shepherd, but like a butcher, he led this precious lamb through an opening in the rails on to a path that slanted across the Common.

"I want to speak to you where we can be quiet," he said. "I want to tell you something and to ask you something. The houses must not look at us, and vehicles must not drown our words with the harsh clangor of their wheels. Only Nature must be a witness—the green grass, the leafy elms, the blue sky, and the ponds shining in the sun. Nature calls to us at such moments as a mother to her children, as a hen to her chickens—Nature, which is the expression of God's love for His little ones. Phœbe, I can keep silence no longer!"

Oh, how beautifully he spoke! And as he spoke how remarkably green became the grass of the Common, how majestically the tall elms towered up to the blue sky, how

sweetly, how sweetly the fresh pure air of the morning came to her brow, her nostrils, and her lips!

They passed the first big pond, where one or two serious and bearded men, with long poles ending in brass hooks, were watching very critically the running of their yachts before the wind; they skirted the side of Windmill Pond, where dirty, bare-legged, bare-headed, and noisy children were fishing for sticklebacks with nets and bottles tied with string about the necks. They followed a narrow path through gorse-bushes, which were rather black with smoke and fog, and they came at last very circuitously to Island Pond, where children of the upper classes, with nurses in stiff linen, were sailing little boats, where dogs were paddling at the water's edge, barking as if the end of the world had come, and where one or two very professional-looking anglers sat upon campstools eating sandwiches and looking voraciously at their floats.

By this time heaven had opened her golden gates and let them both in. Maurice had told her the business on which he desired to speak to her father; she had begged him to defer so perilous an undertaking until his position was more assured, and he, sorrowfully confessing his humble birth, his narrow up-bringing, and his meager salary, had suddenly heard himself addressed as "Dear Maurice," and suddenly felt her little hand slipped within his arm.

When they arrived at Island Pond, where the air is at its freshest and the sun shines on a fine morning at its brightest, they were so ecstasied by their love that they stood there, arm in arm, shoulder to shoulder, as close as ever true lovers ever stood in public, smiling upon the cheerful scene which greeted their eyes, blessing it with the happiness of their love. She did not think at all about people seeing them; but he hoped, and hoped very happily, that everyone would take notice of him, standing there so finely and heroically with an exquisite lady on his arm who was the very pink of patrician

grace. It pleased him to observe that one very distinguished-looking woman, engaged in drying the legs of a little boy in brown holland and a sailor's hat, was rather carelessly performing the task, so interested was she in the Romeo and Juliet attitude of Phœbe and himself. If only Gowler could see him, too! Poor Maud! perhaps if she should pass at this blissful moment she would realize the depth and the width of that gulf, social and intellectual, which separated a Gowler from a Sangster. How preposterous that people of her class should dream of equality with him! It only showed that ignorant people did not understand kindness and sympathy; they presumed upon kindness. One could not touch pitch without defilement; it was necessary to be proud; there was reason for aloofness.

He led Phœbe away, and said to her: "You have told me that you believe in me, dear Phœbe. Let me tell you what I intend to do. My course is quite plain before my eyes, and I shall make no mistakes. I intend to augment my salary by journalism, but not to become a journalist. I shall maneuver for a post at Liberal headquarters, exchange the provincialism of a sectarian organization for the metropolitan power and dignity of our central caucus. Once there, I shall not rest till I am at the head of the organization—the chief agent of the Liberal Party and the master mind of its machinery! It means a thousand a year at the least; it means an honor, if I want one; it means mixing with the best families in the land."

"Oh, but I should not like that," she exclaimed.

"Do you think," he asked very fiercely, "that I intend to drag you down? Do you think that I could bear to see you moving in a society lower than that in which you move now by the right of your father's position and your own ladylike charm? No, dear Phœbe, no! I will not marry you till I have made my mark in the world."

In vain she protested that her position was a humble one;

he would not hear of such a thing. No, he knew perfectly well that he was the son of a newsagent and stationer, while she was the beautiful daughter of one of the greatest financiers in the City of London.

“Your brother has been to Oxford,” he said. “Think of that! Think what it implies! I went to a Board-school, my brothers went to a Board-school; and one of my brothers is now a railway booking-clerk, another is employed as a milkman’s assistant, and the third and youngest goes round the town delivering newspapers!”

Certainly when he put it in this way Phœbe did see that their social positions were very different. She was conscious of feeling cold—not that her love dwindled, but that she feared what her father would say.

“I have no wish, dear Maurice, to be grand and rich,” she said gently. “I only want to be happy with you, whatever your circumstances may be. If necessary,” she added very sweetly, “I will do the work of our home.”

“What,” he cried, “marry you without a servant! I’d rather die first! Think of your beautiful complexion scorched by the kitchen fire, your little hands red and swollen from the washtub! No; we shall keep a servant. You shall be a lady as Mrs. Sangster even as you are a lady now as Miss Champness.”

He then went off into a most enchanting account of his earliest passion for her at Derby. He told the complete story of that romance—how he had stood at night outside her father’s house, how he had written poems about her, how he had looked and looked at her in chapel and Sunday-school, how he had hoped in prayer-meetings that his eloquence might touch her heart.

“I was green then,” he said, “desperately green. I was only a narrow-minded prig. It was cheek of me, frightful and unpardonable cheek, even to dream of you; but I did love you, Phœbe, love you with all my boyish ardor, like the

beggar in a fairy tale who dares to love a beautiful princess. Think of it; you a solicitor's daughter, splendidly dressed, educated like a lady, and lovely as an angel. I a poor news-agent's son, my clothes second-hand and shabby, my knowledge of the world got only from books, my position a journalist on the staff of a small Radical newspaper! And I dared, I presumed, to love you! I see as a proof though, that I was conscious even then of power and ability. But now how much deeper and stronger is my love! I know the world. I have broadened my mind. I am a Londoner associated with the organization of the Liberal Party. And I have set the whole world thinking with my articles in the *London Herald*. How happy I am! How proud! How conscious of power! All the prizes I win and all the laurels I may earn shall be laid at your feet. Two days ago, Phœbe, I was a nobody. To-day I am a man of note, and the happiest lover under our Heavenly Father's dear blue sky!"

That night, when Mr. Christopher Jiggins returned from the City, Mrs. Jiggins flew down the stairs to meet him.

"Come in here," she said mysteriously, leading the way into the drawing-room.

He entered with his shining hat upon his head, his dogskin, black-stitched gloves on his hands, his crutched stick still grasped in the middle and held against his breast, the toothpick which he had sucked from London still between his teeth.

"It has come to a pretty pass!" she announced. "What do you think? I saw them this morning on the Common, arm in arm, and as close together as our *Ampelopsis vetchii* and the wall of our house. Oh, there's no mistake about it. I shouldn't be the least surprised to find that they are secretly married. Now, what do you think of that? In public! On Clapham Common! Hundreds of people about!"

Mr. Jiggins worked the toothpick about in his mouth for a moment or two, and then said: "The old man sent him

a check for fifty guineas this afternoon, and told him to call to-morrow evening. The young squirt has been writing articles in one of their beastly Radical papers. Something about slums and the working classes. The fellow's infernally dangerous. These Dissenters always are. I loathe the breed. No patriotism, no respect for their superiors. I think it's time I cooked his goose for him."

And Mr. Jiggins crossed the room to the looking-glass over the mantelpiece, considered his image with a critical but approving scrutiny, removed his shining tall hat from his pomatumed head, and, turning round again, presented his cheek to his wife, asking how she had been all day, and how "the kid" had behaved, and whether she would care for a stroll.

He had the feeling that he ought to show himself to the ladies of Clapham.

XI

FIFTY guineas was good, but Maurice had hoped for more. However, an invitation to the house at Clapham was a sign of improved relations. He might be able at this interview to persuade Mr. Champness to draw another check, and to show a greater enthusiasm for the ideas of a working-man candidature.

He was shown neither into the drawing-room nor the dining-room. The servant led him into a small dark chamber at the back of the house, and looked at him rather sniffingly as he entered.

"This may mean," reflected Maurice, "that Mr. Champness is going to speak confidentially to me. Perhaps he will ask me to find him a constituency, and set the machinery in motion for a baronetcy. I should not be surprised."

He looked about him. It was one of those dreadful back

rooms which grow chilly, inhuman, and forbidding from disuse; it was the study of Mr. Champness, never entered by anybody else, never used by him except on the rarest occasions, and then briefly enough. The chair at the desk had been used occasionally, but the arm-chair never. The clock on the mantelpiece had run down. The theological works filling the shelves as tightly as sardines filling a tin had the appearance of policemen standing immovably on parade. The creeper which hung like a pall over the one window muffled the air and defied the light to enter if it dare. There was only one playful note in this horrid room, a croquet-mallet between the bookcase and the wall.

The door opened and Mr. Champness entered the room slowly, solemnly, an appalling sternness in his face. Maurice was struck dumb. He knew immediately that something had happened to discover his romance. He neither advanced nor put out his hand.

Mr. Champness stood still just inside the door, confronting him. "What have you to say for yourself?" he demanded.

"I don't understand——"

"You do, perfectly well. Don't prevaricate, sir! Your guilt is written on your face. What have you to say to me?" He advanced another step.

"Mr. Champness," said Maurice, swallowing in his throat, standing first on one foot and then on another, taking his handkerchief from his pocket and rubbing it in the palms of his hands, "I am ready, perfectly ready, to answer any question you may put to me. I can guess what the matter is to which you refer, but until you put your questions I have nothing to say."

The old man was measuring him with a steady gaze. He saw in Maurice's pale face and startled eyes the visionary and the fanatic; he thought that he saw behind the visionary and the fanatic a certain power of mind that was as great

as his own, but exercised in some region of life about which he knew nothing.

"You have come to this house under false pretenses," he said fightingly, and advanced another step.

"That is not true," replied Maurice quietly.

"You have taught my daughter to deceive her father."

"Never!"

"You have corrupted a perfectly innocent nature."

"Dare you say such a thing?"

"And, put upon trial, you assume an air of righteous indignation. Confound you, sir! I've half a mind to kick you out of my house!" He advanced another step, seeming to expand at that moment like a turkey-cock at full-spread.

"Mr. Champness! Mr. Champness!" cried Maurice, drawing back, and speaking with reproachful horror. "Is it possible that you forget the religion which we both profess? *Kick me out of your house!* Is that the way for one Christian man to speak to another? I am surprised—I am pained. Someone must have poisoned your mind against me. You are heated. You are beside yourself. Reflect for a moment. Are you the man now who once prayed with me? Are you the man who has encouraged me, helped me, *generously* helped and stimulated me, in my work for the Liberal Party and the Connexion? We have knelt in the same chapel. We have prayed in the same meeting. If—if I have done you a wrong, tell me of it, reproach me with it; you will find that I am not slow to acknowledge my faults and humbly to crave your forgiveness. But, Mr. Champness, don't, I beg you, speak of *kicking me out of your house!*"

The financier munched his lips together. One of his hands grasped the lapel of his coat, as if it were trying to hold him back; with the fingers of the other hand he was drumming irritably on the top of the desk by the side of which he now stood, tall and minatory.

"I have not summoned you here to discuss religion," he said contemptuously. "Religion does not encourage deception and hypocrisy. I have summoned you here——" He stopped, remembering that he had requested Maurice to call before Jiggins had told him of the dreadful scene on Clapham Common. "However, I do not intend to waste my time with you. Without further words, I would have you to know that your perfidious conduct has been discovered. You have dared, most insolently, to contemplate the presumptuous idea, forgetting your position and my position, of marrying my daughter! Without asking my permission, as any honorable man in your position would have done, you have met her in secret, plotted and planned in secret to get her innocent nature under your influence, and have actually dared—upon my soul, I can scarce keep my hands off you!—dared to walk about in public with your arm, sir—your arm through the arm of my daughter!"

It flashed through the mind of Maurice that a very similar charge had been brought against him by Gowler, and for a moment he had the strange and shattering sensation of feeling himself to be an incorrigible Don Juan. He had the ghastly inclination which comes to some men in crises of this kind to burst out laughing; but instead, trembling with fear lest involuntary laughter should convulse him, he let off steam by means of a sickly and most provocative smile, which he hoped might assure his interlocutor that the matter was less serious than he thought it to be.

But Champness burst out, "Stop your grinning, sir!" in a voice of thunder. "How dare you grin at me like that! I believe you to be a rogue and a villain—a dirty hypocrite, a scheming adventurer! All your talk about religion is hypocrisy—hypocrisy and cant! I'll have you dismissed from the Political Fund. I'll have you flung into the streets. Daring to grin at me, you impudent puppy, you!"

"This is most unseemly of you, Mr. Champness, most

unseemly!" Maurice exclaimed. "I smiled merely because I rejoiced to find that your charges against me are so frivolous."

"What!" cried Champness. "Are you going to lie to me? I'd have you to know, sir, that my daughter has confessed everything. I think if I have not already cured her, the knowledge that her religious saint and political hero is a liar will finish the matter. I shall report that fact to her with other things—your insolence, your grinning insolence, and your psalm-singing cant!"

Maurice pulled himself together. It is all very well to write and to read about such ordeals as this, but people of a sensitive and highly-strung nature, those who know how hard a matter it is to tackle a chauffeur, to correct a parlor-maid, or to go into a witness-box, will realize and will generously acknowledge that Maurice was in a very uncomfortable and distressing position. When, therefore, I say that Maurice pulled himself together, the reader must remember that the man who performed this feat was a man whose heart was going nineteen to the dozen, who was moist in every pore, whose knees were continually inclined to give, and whose brain seemed to be boiling in his head and steaming through his eyes.

"Mr. Champness," he said in a low voice, his face deadly white, his breath coming in sniffing gasps and quivering snorts, "you speak to me as if I am dirt beneath your feet. You arrogate to yourself a piety, a nobility, a superiority which, whether you are entitled to them or not, are used by you on the present occasion to degrade me. That is the position of a Pharisee. I leave you to reflect upon the fact when I am gone. But I will tell you now, that I consider myself, in spite of all my faults, worthy to stand in your presence and worthy to be treated with respect and courtesy. I know the differences in our position. You are rich, I am poor. But you are not so rich as Dives, and I am not so

poor as Lazarus. There is one equality between us, as there was one equality between Dives and Lazarus—we are both sons of God and heirs of eternal life. And there is another equality between us, Mr. Champness, which did not exist between Dives and Lazarus—the equality which exists between all men in an age of democracy. I stand up to you without shame and without dishonor. I say to you that, in your own house, to which I was invited in a letter that gave no indication of change in your disposition towards me, you have grossly insulted me and scandalously traduced me. Until you acknowledge your wrong, until you confess that you have behaved towards me as no man has a right to behave towards another, I shall refuse to give you the explanation you have demanded of me. I do not ask you to beg my pardon—only the most perfect Christian could have grace sufficient for such an act—but I do ask you to acknowledge that you have erred in your behavior towards me, Mr. Champness—erred, sir, in a manner for which you ought to be profoundly penitent.”

The financier put both hands—they were trembling—to the collar of his coat. Regarding Maurice with an exceeding fixity, and clearing his throat, which was dry with indignation, and giving a little upward jerk of his head, which felt rather heavy and stiff, as though the cramp had got into it, he said :

“ You will leave my house to-night, never to enter it again. You insulted my daughter yesterday, but for the last time. You will never speak to her again. Let me advise you, if your career means anything to you at all, to behave yourself in future with the humility and the subservience of a person in your position ! ”

He turned round, walked towards the door, and had his hand stretched out to open it, when Maurice, catching sight of the croquet-mallet, and half inclined to use it against his

adversary, strode after him, came close to his side, and said, with great heat and passion:

"Are you attempting to intimidate me? Do you think you can bully me? What! you will throw me into the streets? Try! Attempt it! I dare you to do it!"

He was trembling with indignation.

"The day will come, Mr. Champness, when you will break your heart with shame to think of this cowardly and atrocious threat. Your power is great now, but it is not omnipotent. You could not exist for twenty-four hours if democracy decreed that you should take off your coat and work for your living. Men exist in England to-day who neither fear you nor respect you, who regard you as the leech and the parasite of labor—an enemy of the people. Take care, Mr. Champness, take care what you say to me. I am not a man to be frightened, nor a man to be insulted. You turn me out of your house!—take care I do not pull the house about your ears. You refuse to let me see your daughter!—take care that daughter does not come to me, never to see you again, never to wish to see you again!"

Champness swung open the door, pointed with a shaking hand to the hall, and shouted out:

"Let me hear not another word! Get out with you—out of my house and out of my sight!"

Maurice looked him full in the eyes.

"I may live," he cried, "to regret what I have said to you; but you will remember to your life's end what you have said to me, remember it with sorrow and remorse!"

XII

TREMBLING with indignation, Maurice returned to his lodgings. He felt as if he had been tossed in a blanket, dragged through a thorn hedge, treated as a football, and

ducked in a sulphur spring. The poor fellow tried to think connectedly, but could not; his brain refused to keep still—it jumped about like one of those little cork balls wriggling and bumping in scientific shop-windows on the top of a spray of water.

He gained his room without molestation from the Gowler family. Grateful for this minor blessing, he locked the door, lighted the gas, and threw himself face downwards on the bed.

Was she lost to him? That was his first question. Before he could answer it, however, a second question fizzed in his brain. Would he be dismissed from the Political Fund? Across the nightmare of that question flashed the blaze of his glory as a journalist. But suppose he rose to be the greatest journalist of his day, became perhaps the editor of a newspaper that revolutionized the entire social order and brought Millennium to the earth in a glass coach drawn by eight cream horses as fat as the Lord Mayor's coachman, how would that minister to his own personal happiness, how would that satisfy the craving humanity in his poor mortal heart, if Phœbe were lost to him?

He could not disguise from himself that, with all her beauty and distinction, Phœbe was somewhat lacking in spirit. It had cost him a considerable effort to stand up to the financier. He could not imagine Phœbe playing so heroic a part. He was something of a lion, but Phœbe was entirely of the ovine order. She would submit, she would bow. Whatever Mr. Champness had to give her she would take lying down.

As this dreadful prospect presented itself to his imagination, the conviction that Phœbe was now definitely and irrevocably lost to him slowly and gradually fastened itself into his mind with so many red-hot screws of hopeless and mocking despair that he sprang from the bed with a groan, thrust his hands through his hair, and began to pace the little room

in a very agony of dejection, striving with all the splendid courage of his fine nature to wrench these screws out of his heart, and hurl them into the bottomless abyss of non-existence.

At last, unable to bear the torture of disordered thoughts, he dragged a chair to the table, dipped his pen into the ink, and set himself to write the letter of his life. He wrote for two hours. If he had been a man of business, he might have said all that he did say in three or four lines. A man like Mr. Champness, for instance, would have written: "DEAR PHŒBE,—I beg you to have faith in me, and to wait till I am in a position to have another go. In the meantime kindly inform me that you are not indifferent to me, so as to confirm the impression you have already given me. With kind regards, yours still truly, ——" This was, indeed, the sum of Maurice's letter. But Maurice being something of a poet, and his letter being written with a quill plucked from the wing of his frustrated ambition, and dipped into the blood of his fractured heart, ran to a considerable number of sheets. And at the end it was a letter far more likely to sway the affections of a woman, far more likely to create in the heart of even a meek and submissive and ovine woman one of those heroic and impetuous passions which are capable of defying lions in the way and dragons in the air, than the model missive hypothecated above.

When he had read and re-read this letter several times, Maurice drew his chair to the window, stood upon it, thrust his heated head rather gingerly between sash and blind, and looked into the night. The murmur of the great city rose to his ears, as it always does on these occasions. The breath of London, compounded in that neighborhood of smoke, fried fish, and cab-stables, came about him with a chill, cooling, ghost-like indifference. He looked above crowded chimney-pots to the pallid stars of a cloudy sky. In the distance he could see the red, orange, and violet flames of

tall stacks licking at the darkness of the upper regions. By craning his head to the right, at the risk of dislocating his neck, he could catch a glimpse of the Houses of Parliament.

He thought of his fame. Yesterday he had been nobody—to-day he had set the Thames on fire. At the center of the greatest Empire the world had ever known, he, the son of a newsagent in Derby, had lifted up his voice, and had been heard of all men. He thought of the millions of people making up the population of London—he knew the exact figures from Whittaker—and flattered himself with the dizzying thought that out of all those multitudinous millions he, Maurice Sangster, was famous—famous as Byron had been famous, and Dr. Johnson, and John Milton, and Bacon. He had written, and men had taken note. Even now, at this very moment, in the clubs of London men were discussing his articles. Mr. Gladstone had, no doubt, read what he had written. Mr. John Morley, Mr. Bright, the Duke of Argyll, Lord Tennyson, Herbert Spencer, and perhaps Mr. Ruskin, had spent the greater part of that day reading his second article, and conferring about it with their distinguished friends. If only Carlyle had lived a little longer!

And yet, in spite of this glorious and bewildering fame, he was wretched and sick with fear. He drew in his head, got down from the chair, and read his letter over again. Then he sat down and added this postscript: "My position even now is absolutely secure. I have made my name as a journalist. *More people are now reading every day what I have written than Sir Walter Scott could boast of at the height of his fame.* And yet your father treated me as if I were the vilest dirt of the street! He insulted me, outraged my feelings, and degraded me in a most abominable manner. But I will prove to him before a year is overpast that I am someone in the world. He shall withdraw every word he has said against me; he shall beg my pardon. And you,

Phœbe, you will be loyal to your love! *God has given you that love.* Honor your father so long as he does not thrust himself imperiously and tyrannically between you and the Divine Will. But whatever happens, cling to your love as a holy and a sacred possession. Let no man rob you of it. Say boldly and fearlessly that you will never be false and traitorous to the purest passion of your virgin heart. Courage, my angel, courage! Summon to your aid the angel of victory. I am conquering the world only to lay it at your feet."

He slept not at all till Big Ben had crawled round to the small hours and sounded the quarter after two; and after that but badly, tossing feverishly, groaning, dreaming, waking every now and then with a start. Once he was obliged to rise and make terrifying noises out of the window to a party of cats on the cistern. Once he sprang up from the pillow to ward off a murderous blow from Mr. Champness, who was crouching on the foot of his bed with a croquet-mallet raised above his head. And at another moment, he woke with a cry of terror just as he was flinging the inconvenient Maud Gowler to the ground in order that he might plunge into the waters of Island Pond and drag the drowned body of his dearest Phœbe to the bank.

When he was dressed, he came out of his bedroom, feeling very heavy and sick, into a reek of fish ascending from the basement. He descended the stairs with his letter in his hand. In the passage he encountered Maud Gowler with a broom.

"What a smell of fish," he said.

"Fish? No, herrings!" she replied, shaking her head, a look of blank stupidity on her face.

He could make nothing of this answer, and walked to the door.

"You aren't never going out without your breakfast!" she called after him.

He turned round. "I'm not very well this morning. I couldn't eat anything. And I'm very busy."

"You're killing yourself," she said, "that's what you're doing. I suppose *you're* in love, and she isn't!"

He thought to himself: "She is suffering as I am suffering. Poor thing! I am sorry for her. In her degree she knows, as I know, the bitterness of life."

At the first newsagent's shop he bought a copy of the *London Herald*, and opened it eagerly as he walked along to read his third article. He became so absorbed that he passed the post-office with Phoebe's letter in his hand. What a splendid article it was! He bumped into telegraph boys, collided with lamp-posts, and suffered the humiliation of being shouted at by little girls pushing perambulators, who wanted to know why he didn't look where he was going to.

The reading of the article was as nourishing as many breakfasts. He folded up the paper, put it under his arm, and raised his eyes to the world with cheerfulness and blessing. It was not for several minutes that he became aware of the still unposted letter to Phoebe.

His brain was now working with its normal precision. He went as quickly as omnibus could take him to the private house of Dr. Mundy. The reverend gentleman had just finished his breakfast, and welcomed Maurice in his study, where he was reading the *London Herald*.

"Splendid!" he said, jumping up and clapping the young man on the shoulder. "My dear fellow, these are the finest things that have been done in modern journalism. I'm delighted. I can't tell you how delighted I am!"

Maurice said, smiling rather sadly: "I am not likely to lose my head, sir, in spite of such generous commendation from one whom I so greatly respect."

"What's the matter?" asked the minister, peering at him closely through his spectacles, and laying a hand upon his shoulder. "Something has happened, eh? You're in trou-

ble? What is it? Tell me. I shall be only too glad to help you."

The sincerity and kindness of the man won Maurice's completest confidence. He told the whole story of his love for Phœbe, gave a dramatic account of his interview with Mr. Champness, and concluded with the threat of the financier to have him flung into the street.

Dr. Mundy was grave. "You are looking rather high, are you not?" he said, lifting his eyebrows and drawing down the corners of his mouth. "Miss Champness, I take it, is a lady of some distinction. Her father is a man of wealth. Still, love knows nothing of artificial barriers. If you love her, you have a perfect right to say so, and if she loves you—well, it looks as if you ought to be married. As for the threat of her father, I don't think that is serious. It was probably said in the heat of the moment. Still, some men can be exceedingly nasty when they are put out, and rich men, unfortunately, have enormous power in the Connexion. However, don't let that disturb you. I should resist any such tyranny with all the forces at my disposal. And besides, your position is now secure."

And then, sitting down in his arm-chair, and bidding Maurice be seated, the minister proceeded to unfold a plan which had been in his mind for a day or two, and which this story just told him by Maurice certainly seemed to confirm. He suggested that the clerk who had been doing the work of the Political Fund during Maurice's absence in Bursby should continue to discharge that duty, whilst Maurice should set out on a tour of the whole country, visiting every principal industrial center, conferring with ministers, organizing the local political forces, and bringing the scattered machinery of political Nonconformity into direct relation with the headquarters of the movement in London.

"You will have distraction from your personal trouble," concluded the minister; "it will give Mr. Champness time to

cool down; it will afford you a priceless opportunity of distinguishing yourself; and you will be able to add to your income by writing for the *London Herald*. My ambition is to get Nonconformity out of the rut, to make it a great national force, to associate it with democracy, to change it from a scattered and dismembered form of dissent from clericalism into the living and conquering religion of a free people. Now, if you can help to do that, Sangster, think what it will mean! Why, we shall put your statue up in Parliament Square, bury you in Westminster Abbey, and write books about you when you are dead! Doesn't that tempt you? Doesn't that rouse the lion in your bosom?"

Maurice acknowledged that the idea appealed to him. "But," he said, with a grim smile, "before being buried in Westminster Abbey, I should rather like to be married in your chapel to Miss Champness!"

"Oh, we'll arrange that!" said Dr. Mundy, blinking his eyes. "Never you fear. I'll see what I can do in that matter. But what you must do in the first case is to distinguish yourself, make a great name, have the whole Connexion talking about you. Mr. Champness will yield when you are called the Gladstone of the Free Churches and the Schnadhorst of the Connexion!"

Later in the day Dr. Mundy came to Maurice's office, and told him that his salary was to be raised to one hundred and fifty pounds a year. He brought with him a plan of campaign—a list of towns that Maurice was to visit, with the minister's name and address given in each case, at whose house he could stay. He then suggested that Maurice should go and see the editor of the *London Herald*, acquaint him with this mission, and ask whether he would not like to receive a series of articles describing the condition of industrial England.

Tom Fowler, of the *London Herald*—who wore an eyeglass, had a tall, slightly inflamed forehead, and a big shaggy

mustache which he was in the habit of gnawing—was glad to see Maurice. He congratulated him in a most friendly manner on his article, grinning all over his face, chuckling, and rubbing the thigh of his right leg. He listened with the utmost sympathy to the new proposition, saying “Yes” from time to time in a long-drawn acquiescence of approval.

“A good idea, Mr. Sangster,” he said, in conclusion. “But”—blinking his eyes, grinning broadly, and shaking his head—“I am sorry to see you attaching yourself so deliberately and whole-heartedly to Nonconformity. I fear it may narrow your vision, give a tone to your work that will be unfortunate, jeopardize your chances.” He uncrossed his legs and leaned forward to the young writer, saying confidentially: “Nonconformity, you see—I am a Nonconformist myself—is a negation; it is not an affirmation. It doesn’t grow; it jumps. It only keeps going by revivals and outbursts of sectarian animosity. It doesn’t live. It has no traditions. It lacks tolerance, sweetness, light, charm, and the Catholic spirit. A man may be a Nonconformist without much injury to his mind if he is a passive and formal Nonconformist, as I am, for instance; but he cannot be a working, active, and enthusiastic Nonconformist without jeopardy. Think about that. I am sure you ought to.” He leaned back, crossed his legs, and, stroking his right thigh, continued: “I would rather that you were working for us as a man of the world, as one of our special correspondents, than receive your work as the by-product of your Nonconformist activity. There are traces here and there—forgive me saying so—in these articles which we are now publishing of a Nonconformist origin, of a Nonconformist frame of mind. I want something in your work, excellent as it is, which one finds so superabundantly in Dickens—a large humanity, a sense of humor, a generous indulgence, a wide and affectionate sympathy with all mankind. Now, if you cut

adrift from the Connexion, come to us as a special correspondent, and go about the country as a free man, I think you will do work in this manner. Suppose, for instance, we offered you"—here Tom Fowler became serious and careful, wrinkling up his inflamed forehead and gnawing his mustache—"an engagement for two or three years, at—well, let us say five hundred a year, and all your traveling expenses, don't you think that would suit you better than your present scheme of operations?"

Maurice felt his heart leap in his bosom. Five hundred pounds a year! Why, he could face Mr. Champness on that! Special correspondent of the *London Herald*! Ten pounds a week—well, nearly ten pounds a week! It was as much as he could do to sit still.

"I feel," he replied very calmly, "too committed to Dr. Mundy; I fear I cannot get out of my engagement to him. I shouldn't like to inconvenience him. But won't you trust me to keep my Nonconformity out of my articles?"

"You won't be able to, Mr. Sangster!"

"Yes, now that you have warned me. I see the danger. In fact, I have always known the danger. And I am not so hot a Dissenter as I was, not by a long way—nothing like!"

"None of the young men are!" said Fowler grimly.

"I hate clericalism, and I loathe Rome——"

"That is a mistake," interrupted Tom Fowler. "You should ignore clericalism, and only tease Rome with her own history when you've got nothing better to do. Never be angry with anything, Mr. Sangster—except the Land Laws and the Sultan of Turkey. Are you a teetotaler?"

"Yes."

"I was afraid so."

"But don't you think that drink is the curse of the country?"

"Undoubtedly. I also think that to avoid it ostentatiously, to denounce it as if it were a Tory measure, and to

get excited about it, is very bad for the brain. However, the point is this: your work is good, but it can be better. It will never be better until your sympathies are enlarged, and a sense of humor is cultivated in your mind. Now, I will make this proposal to you. We will give you an engagement for three years at"—he paused and gnawed his mustache—"well," looking up with a spacious grin, "at four hundred a year—an engagement to write for us when we call upon you, and to send us everything you do write. We will pay your traveling expenses when you are sent upon our business, but the Connexion must foot the bill when you are traveling mainly upon theirs. Of course, this engagement must carry with it the obligation on your part not to write for any other morning newspaper. I think, perhaps, we had better say no other London newspaper of any kind, morning or evening."

Maurice's soul jumped as if it had been shot. He knew now, he realized at last, that he was a person of real and considerable importance. A delightful feeling pervaded his whole body. He seemed to be of enormous stature and robed in purple. Tom Fowler looked dirty and untidy and inferior.

"Will you let me think it over?" he asked, with a superb composure.

Fowler watched him narrowly.

"Well, Mr. Sangster," he said good-naturedly, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make you my original offer—five hundred a year. How will that suit you?"

Maurice never felt in better health, nor appreciated so highly the pleasures of self-control. He said calmly: "I should like to think about the matter. You see, this arrangement, by preventing me from writing for other papers——"

"All right, all right," said the editor cheerfully; "we'll make it six hundred a year. A most generous proposition, Mr. Sangster. And we'll pay anything in reason for your

traveling expenses. Come, there isn't another paper in London would offer you such terms."

"You said for two or for three years?" inquired Maurice, whose heart was beating like the kettle-drums at St. George's Barracks.

"Well, we'll make it four years. But only on condition, mind you, that at the end of the term you give us the first right to make you a new proposition. And, mark, the whole thing is based on the assumption that you will do your best as soon as possible to get quit of the Connexion."

Maurice considered the matter. He drew a pocket-book from the inside of his shabby coat, pretended to make an elaborate calculation, and contorted his pale forehead with the rigorous demands of a problem which had no existence in fact.

"Very well!" he answered suddenly, looking up and closing his pocket-book with a quickness that would have been envied by a commercial traveler. "And the engagement will take effect from—when?"

"I will write you a letter to-night," replied Tom Fowler. "The engagement can date from to-day. What is your address, by the way?" he concluded, leaning forward and taking a pen.

Maurice reflected, flushed, and then leaning forward rather too eagerly, as if he had a burning desire to see the editor's pen at work, he gave the address of the Political Fund.

"That's a bad omen!" grinned Tom Fowler. "I'd rather have your home address, I think."

"I am living in lodgings, and leaving them almost at once," replied Maurice, who thought that Lambeth might possibly compromise his position, in spite of the Archbishop's Palace.

"Very well. For the present I will address you at the Fund. But, Mr. Sangster, it would be better for you to

keep your lodgings and get out of the other thing, believe me!"

As he shook hands, he said: "I'm sending you fifty guineas for the articles."

Maurice walked through Fleet Street as if he were the proprietor of all its newspapers, the owner of all the paper-mills that supplied it, and managing director of Reuter's Agency into the bargain. He was really white with exaltation. He could very nearly have screamed with delirious joy. Six hundred pounds a year! Twelve pounds a week—well, nearly twelve pounds! And a reasonable sum for traveling expenses. Then, one hundred and fifty pounds a year from the Fund. That made seven hundred and fifty pounds a year—almost fifteen pounds a week! Why, he could take a big house, keep two servants, and afford a cab when it was raining!

He entirely forgot Phœbe in the first moments of this glorious feeling that he was a man of power and position.

The alternations of fortune! Yesterday morning, famous; last night, outrageously treated and sleepless with agony and despair; this afternoon—seven hundred and fifty pounds a year!

It was like him to take a bus to the house of Dr. Mundy, instead of a hansom-cab. He thought of Phœbe most of the way, but occasionally wondered whether any of the passengers realized that he was a Special Correspondent. Once he took out his note-book, and began to write shorthand. When anybody opened a newspaper, he looked to see if it were the *London Herald*. If a newspaper cart drove by, he glanced out of the bus to see that his property was being properly cared for.

Dr. Mundy saw difficulties in the suggested arrangement. He said that he had no wish to stand in the way of Maurice's advance, but that really he did not think the two engagements could possibly be combined. However, nothing could

be better for Nonconformity than to have a man on the staff of a great London paper who was so earnest and progressive a Nonconformist as Maurice. He would do his best for him. In the meantime let him start off on his present mission as soon as possible.

When Maurice got back to his lodgings, he found a letter waiting for him on the battered hatstand in the passage. The envelope bore grubby marks of the little Gowlers' handling. He tore it open as he stood there under the dismal gas-bracket, guessing at once that it came from Phœbe, and pulled out the letter. Was the day of his glory to be illuminated like the Healtheries Exhibition at night, or plunged into Stygian eclipse?

"DEAR FRIEND" (she wrote),

"I will be true to my love for you. And I will pray night and day that God may overrule all things for our good. My father is very angry now, but I am sure he will change his mind. Leonard is most kind and sympathetic to me. I felt yesterday as if my heart were broken, but to-day I am calm. I cannot tell you how shocked I am to learn that my father treated you with rudeness. I had no idea of such a thing. But try to forgive him. And do pray, dear friend, as I pray that God may change my dear father's heart, and rule all things in accordance with His holy will.

"Your faithful and true friend,

"PHŒBE CHAMPNESS."

In a postscript she had added: "My father has not said anything yet about my writing to you. Write to me once a week, and I will reply. We had better not meet just at present."

Yes, the colored lights were burning, festooned across the night, and the band—all the bands—were playing the Wedding March—"Lum-tum-tee-tum-tee-tum-tum!"

Maurice was elated by this letter. He went up to his

room in the highest of spirits, and sat down at once to tell Phœbe his good news, laughing—yes, sitting back every now and then in his chair to laugh aloud.

When the letter was written—he thought it wise at present to defer posting it till the morning, so that it might arrive when Mr. Champness had departed for the City—he undressed, got into bed, and began to read “Sartor Resartus.”

“I must buy Dickens,” he said, putting down the book. “I must study him. In spite of his monstrous and wicked caricatures of Nonconformists—in spite, too, of his horrid propensities in the guzzling and bibbing lines—he evidently has humor. I have read things quoted from him at which a religious man could laugh without shame.”

As he lay waiting for sleep, into the midst of his radiant dreams—the radiant dreams of a young man just beginning to conquer the world—came Maud Gowler, with a startled face, exclaiming: “Fish? No—herrings!” And this mysterious sentence brought back to his mind the reek of the morning, and he fell asleep with the feeling that he was the poet Chatterton striving to reach the stars through the broken window-pane of a London garret.

XIII

If the style of the firm had been “Champness and Son,” one might have pointed to them walking home together, and said, “There it is!” appreciating the endurance of these well-established old houses in the City which pass steadily down the generations from father to son, each father breeding the particular son not only suitable to inherit the traditions of the firm, but to pass them on with mathematical certainty to a son of precisely the same quality.

They were much of a height—Leonard the taller. They

both had stubborn heads, high shoulders, abrupt noses, and a dogged, obstinate look in the eyes. But the amusing thing to notice was the identity of their gait. They both walked heavily, emphasizing the pressure of the left foot, pressing earnestly on the handles of their walking-sticks, striding with the solidity of peasants. The only noticeable difference in their gait lay in the carriage of their heads. The old man stooped at the shoulders a little, but held his head up, staring straight before him, seeing the outside of everything; the young man stooped at the neck, his eyes now on the ground a few paces before him, and now raised and turned sideways for a momentary and puzzled inspection of physical phenomena.

"Do you feel that you will take to the business?" Champness asked, breaking a long silence. Then, after a pause: "Do you like it?"

They were walking in the pleasant glamor of an autumn sunset from the Swan at Stockwell, where they had left the tram.

Leonard did not answer at once.

"I don't think you do," said the father.

"I have been meaning to speak to you on the subject," said Leonard, raising his head for a moment.

"You have been thinking about it, then? I thought so. Well?"

"I don't like it. I don't feel that I am suited to it."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, but not surprised."

"I should like to go to the Bar."

"Well, we could put work into your hands."

"Either the Bar or schoolmastering."

"Which do you prefer?"

"I think the Bar."

"Would you live with us, or go into chambers?"

"I think chambers would be better."

How easily it had been done! No scene of any kind; not

the faintest shock of melodrama. Stubborn men understand each other.

After dinner that night, when Phœbe had gone to her bedroom, Mr. Champness said to his son:

"Your sister is like you: she is determined not to go my way."

"Most people, I suppose, like to go their own way. What do you think of doing?"

"Well, what would you do?"

"I shouldn't interfere."

Mr. Champness nodded his head. He was sitting upright in an arm-chair, looking into the empty fireplace. Leonard was sitting in a lower arm-chair at his side, a book in his lap, an evening newspaper at his feet. The muslin curtains were drawn over the shutters; the white wallpaper with its gilt stenciling looked cold in the gas-light.

"I think she is feeling the matter very keenly," said Leonard.

"I can see she is."

"Do you propose speaking to her again?"

"I thought about it."

"It is rather hard on you that we both appear to be——"

The financier smiled.

"I am not a tyrant, and I hope I am not a fool," he said.

Then, turning his head, and looking at Leonard for the first time, he asked:

"There are other matters on which we are not quite of the same mind, are there not?"

Leonard glanced up over the rims of his spectacles rather uneasily.

"Are there not?" repeated the financier.

"Yes, I think there are," replied Leonard, lowering his gaze, and frowning with a stout oppugnance into the fireplace. He began to fidget with one of his waistcoat buttons.

The old man also turned his eyes to the fireplace. What

they saw there, who can say?—but certainly it was not the same thing.

“You are not very much in sympathy with our body, are you?” demanded the financier.

“No.”

“I thought not.”

Leonard drew in his breath heavily, humped his shoulders, thrust out his lips, and glared at the fireplace savagely.

“Are you thinking of making a change?” asked the father.

“My sympathies are largely with the Anglican Church,” said Leonard, setting the button free of the buttonhole.

“High or Low?”

“Well, with the High.”

“I’m sorry to hear it.” Mr. Champness was beating with the fingers of his right hand on the back of his left.

“I have no sympathy with the excesses of what is called the Ritualistic party,” said Leonard, stretching out his legs, and saving the book on his lap from sliding to the floor.

“But you like the High Church party? It has your sympathies—the High party?”

“I appreciate the historical basis, the Catholic character, of the Anglican Church—yes.”

“All this comes from Oxford, I suppose.”

“I began to think about the matter at Oxford.”

“What is your feeling about the Nonconformist bodies? Not very warm, I think?”

“I don’t understand their basis, to begin with. I don’t understand how a man can be born a Nonconformist, or a Dissenter of any kind. I can understand a man becoming a Nonconformist, or a man arriving at a set of opinions which makes him dissent from another set of opinions. But I don’t see how he can be born into negation or inherit a tradition of dissent. You can’t build historically on a foundation of contradiction and opposition!”

"I see."

"The Anglican Church," Leonard explained in his slow and decisive way of expounding opinion, "is not a dissenting nor a protesting Church. It is an historical Church. Rome has diverged. The Anglican Church has kept straight on. So far as I know, every tradition of the Anglican Church is a Catholic and apostolic tradition. If Christ founded a Church, the Anglican Church seems to me the communion which has preserved most purely the body and spirit of that society."

"Very well."

After a considerable silence, Leonard said suddenly and thoughtfully:

"I can perfectly understand the position of a man who says, 'I don't want catholic tradition; I don't want formalism of any kind, however hallowed by time and consecrated by the saints; I want a personal and vital experience of religion which will transform my own life at its center.' That may be quite right and good. But I think it is a dangerous thing to make that single experience a reason for breaking the fellowship of Christ's Church. I am perfectly certain that it is a bad and wrong thing to start another Church on such a ground, especially when one of the chief objects of the new Church is to attack the original and catholic Church."

Mr. Champness nodded. Then he asked:

"What is your position towards Rome? I should like to hear that, if it is not troubling you too much?"

"I regard her," said Leonard, rubbing his shoulders into the back of his chair, and drawing in his chin, "as a catholic but clearly heretical Church. Even her undoubted catholicism is in danger, owing to the Italian character of the College of Cardinals. If it had not been for 1870, she might have recovered, but that was her death-blow—for intellectual and honest people."

“What do you mean by 1870?”

“The doctrine of Papal Infallibility,” declared Leonard, with the air of a judge. “The whole Church of Christ may call itself in the sphere of ecclesiastical doctrine and discipline infallible, and the Pope, expressing the voice of that Church, may justly claim infallibility; but to asseverate that the Pope *per se* is infallible, or that the College of Cardinals is infallible, that is heresy. Also—at least, in my opinion—it is nonsense.”

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked in unbroken quiet for five minutes.

At the end of this long silence Mr. Champness slowly drew in his feet, put his hands to the arms of his chair, and rose lumberingly to his feet.

“Well,” he said, “we’ve had a good talk; I think we understand each other.”

He then walked to the gas-bracket, and asked his son if he were ready for bed.

Leonard rose with his book in his hand. He opened the door, while his father turned down the gas. The old man passed on before him into the hall, and went slowly round the ground floor, seeing that windows were hasped, shutters fastened, and doors locked. He turned out the hall gas, and they ascended the stairs in the subdued light of a single burner on the upper floor, the old man in front, Leonard behind.

On the first floor Mr. Champness opened the door of his bedroom, and then went to the gas-bracket on the landing. Leonard came to him then. They kissed each other in their usual rough fashion, and said good night. When Leonard had ascended to the floor above, the old man turned out the landing gas, walked into his bedroom, and shut the door.

The room was a large one, with a great double bed of shining brass against the wall. A ponderous suite of mahogany furniture did not minimize the spaciousness of this wide and

lofty apartment, which was papered in green and had a bay-window overlooking the garden. Mr. Champness looked a small man as he walked to and fro in the course of his undressing, winding up his watch and placing it with his money on the table at the bedside, hanging his coat and waistcoat in the wardrobe, taking off his collar and tie and laying them on the dressing-table.

Close to the bed, over the table where an old leather-bound Bible lay beside the watch and the money, hung a portrait in a black ebony frame—a photographer's colored enlargement of a cabinet photograph. When Champness had said his prayers, which only occupied him a few minutes, he looked, as was his morning and nightly custom, at this portrait of his wife, standing before it in his old-fashioned cotton nightgown and bare feet, his hair ruffled by the pulling of shirt and vest over his head—rather a mournful and lonely figure.

The old lady greeted her widowed husband with the eternal smile of her unconquerable serenity. It was one of those very amiable faces whose commonplace features are entirely forgotten in the grace, sweetness, and tranquillity of their benevolence. There was a white lace cap on the head, with loops of tiny pink ribbon let into the lace, and broad lace lappets resting on her shoulders; cockscrew curls were bunched on either side of the face; the dress was of silver-gray silk, with a fichu of white lace on the breast fastened at the neck by a large cameo-brooch set in gold. The long chain of thin-linked gold which the financier had drawn over his head, and which now lay with the watch and money on the table, appeared in the portrait round the old lady's neck. One of her hands was holding this chain at her bosom, the other was laid upon a Bible upon her lap—the same old leather Bible which stood on the table. The photographer had given this matron of the bourgeoisie the exquisite and delicate coloring of a young girl.

Champness said to himself:

"They both get it from you, my dear; she her meekness and he his vapors. I've only given them their obstinacy. Old lady, I wish you were here. Yes, I do, indeed."

He turned out the gas and got into bed.

He was still thinking of his dead wife, the dead wife smiling in the darkness from the portrait on the green wall. He thought to himself:

"She never knew how things had improved with us. She died when we were spending six hundred a year. She was careful to the last, always proud of keeping down expenses. She thought six hundred a year was a lot of money. So it is. But we're spending nearly a thousand now. What would she have said if I had told her that our capital stood at forty thousand pounds? What would she say now if she knew that my capital stands at a hundred and sixty thousand? Nobody knows that. I hate ostentation, I hate show. No man ought to spend more than a thousand a year. Money is a talent intrusted to us. We shall have to give an account of it. I wonder if I shall put that canal scheme through for Nicaragua; good timber, the finest chocolate-trees in the world, excellent crops of coffee and rice, and the mines at Chontales only played with at present. South Africa seems as if it will be a gold country in the future; I must remember to speak to Arbuthnot to-morrow about that Jew fellow. 'Fifteen per cent.,' says Jiggins, but he minimizes the lack of transport. Railways are the thing; I like railways. Keep your eye on the Argentine. Ah, that's a great country. Railways, good railways."

And he fell asleep with the word "railways" rolling through his mind like a train through a tunnel.

It must not be thought that this old man had no answer for his son's criticism of Nonconformity; it must not be thought, because he had lost in London much of his provincial rigid-

ity, that he had abandoned his affection for the Free Churches. He could have answered well enough. He was silent, he was acquiescent, only because he gave his son credit for the same obstinacy as he possessed himself. In a life occupied with enormous transactions and busied financially with the politics and geography of the whole world, Champness had learned never to argue with anybody whose mind is made up. He boasted that he wasted neither money nor time. He claimed that he was not a bigot. If he held tenaciously to his own opinions he allowed others to hold as tenaciously to theirs. "Live and let live" was his motto; his enthusiasm for proselytism was entirely confined to missionary subscriptions. You might have known his ability to argue with Leonard and to remonstrate with Phœbe had you heard him storming to himself next morning as he dressed. He always woke crusty; it was while he put on his clothes that the fooleries of mankind irritated him, and the injuries he had suffered came buzzing at his brain like a swarm of bees. He was a tyrant then, an irascible and bullying old tyrant.

"No historical basis!" he exclaimed to himself this particular morning. "What does the fool mean? What's the historical basis for the telegraph-wire or the railway-train? I should like to know that. Well, let him go his own road! I should like him to see what those Spanish devils have made of Nicaragua! How is it the Roman Catholic countries are all backward and ignorant? Where's the Manchester of Italy, the Birmingham of Portugal, the Huddersfield of Spain? Stuff and nonsense! Priests are the magic-workers and medicine men of barbarous ages; clericalism is the enemy. Gambetta said so. Gambetta was a man. I saw how it was when his friends were here. He likes music, colored windows, chanting. If he is not careful he'll want vestments, candles, and incense. The business doesn't suit him, perhaps not; but he wants to be rid of me—that's

what he means. We've nothing to talk about, nothing in common; he doesn't want to go to chapel, doesn't want to meet our Nonconformist friends. High Church—Ritualism—yes, and Romanism in disguise! What would Cromwell think of our young men? And Milton? What would Luther say to our posturing, corner-creeping, image-worshipping Ritualists, tricked out in fancy needle-work? Englishmen! Freemen! It makes me sick!"

As he buttoned his collar, he said:

"I can't stand her infernal meekness. There she sits, mum, always mum, and pale as the tablecloth. Ah, she's an obstinate little pig-headed cat, if ever there was one! I'll send for her Aunt Mildred. Let her marry that insolent young puppy with his cant and his Socialism. I'll have Mildred here to look after me."

In spite of this explosive anger the old man descended to the dining-room calm and passionless. Phoebe was finding the place in the Bible at the head of the table. She came towards him without a smile, put her hands on his arms, and raised her pale face to be kissed.

"Good-morning, papa," she said.

He noticed how cold she was even in brushing her cheek for a moment with his own, which was hot enough.

He kissed her, and went to the Bible and Book of Family Prayer, feeling for his eyeglasses.

"Shall I ring for the servants?" she asked.

"In a minute; Leonard is not down."

"I think he overslept this morning."

"He generally does."

He placed the eyeglasses on the end of his nose and sat down.

She came close to him in order to lower the flame of the stove. He was running his finger down the page of the Bible, his head a little tilted to see through his glasses, his lips pursed up, his chin pressed forward.

"You've made up your mind, I think, to marry that young man?" he demanded, still looking for the place.

She raised herself from the lamp, folded her hands in front of her, and looked at him.

He glanced at her over the rims of his eyeglasses.

"I shall never marry anybody else," she murmured quietly but firmly.

"I thought not." He returned to the Bible. "Well, you had better write to him and arrange matters. I suppose he can keep you?"

"What do you mean, papa?"

"I mean what I say. I suppose he can keep you?"

"Yes; he is well off."

"How well off? I'm entitled to ask that, I think."

"His income is——"

"Income! You mean wages, don't you?"

"I don't know what it is called, papa, but he earns between seven and eight hundred a year."

"Does he, indeed?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then. You can get married at once. Ring for the servants."

She stood in the same position. A slight tremor ran through her body. Her face, which had flushed a few minutes before, became very white. With a little cry, her hands spread in front of her, she stumbled forward, knelt at his side, placed her hands on his arms, and said:

"Can't you be kinder, papa? Please be kinder to me!"

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair, drew away from her, and said, catching the eyeglasses which had fallen from the end of his nose:

"Come, come, we don't want scenes. Ring the bell. Let one of the servants go for Leonard. We're over our time now."

Then he added, with a short laugh, putting on his eyeglasses:

"You've got your own way, haven't you? What more do you want?"

She rose from her knees, and said to him:

"You don't forbid me to marry, papa, but you won't consent? That's what you mean, isn't it?"

"Precisely."

"If mamma had been alive I think you would have treated me more kindly."

"You are of age. You are free to do what you like. I don't forbid you to marry the man you have chosen, and I don't attempt to make you marry a man you don't like. But you can't expect me to approve of your marrying a man I regard with disfavor—a young gentleman who had the impudence to call me a Pharisee. That would be absurd. I wouldn't have done it for your mother, and I don't think she would have asked me to do it. Certainly I shall not do it for you! Ring the bell, please."

Leonard came down, rather shaggy-looking, buttoning his waistcoat. The servants entered behind him. Before they were all seated Mr. Champness announced:

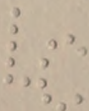
"Gospel of Luke, chapter eleven, verse twenty-nine."

When breakfast was half over, he said to Leonard, lowering his newspaper and looking over the top of the sheet and over the top of his glasses:

"There is no need for you to come to the office again. You'd better see about chambers and make your arrangements. I'll provide you with a hundred a year till you can earn your own living."

As he was leaving the house he said to Phœbe, who still came every day to see him off:

"I'm writing for your Aunt Mildred to come and take charge here. You will be perfectly free to consult your own convenience after she has arrived."



PART II

MARRIAGE AND FACTS

I

IN spite of the rain, which came down as if it liked it and wanted to frighten the next rainbow out of its life, the square was filled from side to side with an enormous crowd of people, the blinds of the houses were drawn up, and many of the balconies were occupied. Here and there an unlucky umbrella, shining in the gaslight, might be seen pitching and tossing over the heads of the multitude like a fisherman's boat in a stormy harbor. For the most part, however, the crowd faced towards the town-hall with no effort beyond an upturned collar to protect itself from that downpour.

It was a crowd careless of weather—that rather liked bad weather, in fact—a Lancashire crowd of short-legged, broad-chested, white-faced people dressed in rough workaday clothes, with shabby caps on their heads and knotted scarves around their throats. They were infinitely more cheerful than an audience of comfortable people at the Opera. Some of them were singing, others were calling, shouting, whistling; most of them were laughing. When a couple of mounted policemen forced a passage through the thick of the multitude, driving people in a swaying sudden rush into denser and almost suffocating congestion, the crowd imitated the screams and high-piping shrieks of women in a panic. Bursts of merriment were well-nigh as continuous as the rain.

A line of policemen, slipping about on their feet and leaning their backs against the crowd, endeavored to preserve the sanctity of a dangerously narrow space in front of the town-hall. A carriage was drawn up here, looking as if it had been fished out of a river and left drawn up in front of the town-hall since last St. Swithin's Day; the two dejected horses were soaked to the skin; the mackintosh cape of the coachman on the box streamed with water, the brim of his hat dripped on to his nose, the reins were so heavy that his arms ached. It was difficult to see that the candles were lighted in the lamps of this streaming carriage, so clouded and smeared was the glass.

A crowd of men and women, very much more sedate than the crowd in the square, stood under the portico of the town-hall. The vestibule was crowded, too; policemen and officials lined the marble staircase, and a congregation of important-looking ladies and gentlemen stood about in groups talking with animation, breaking up every minute, and reforming again in fresh combinations. These fortunate people, with room to move about and almost entirely sheltered from the rain, had their backs to the square, and were standing tiptoe peering over each other's heads through the tall glass doors into the vestibule.

Every now and then a roar like the falling of a huge wave sounded from the interior of the town-hall, and was heard by those under the portico, who each time pressed nearer to the doors, and asked themselves, with great eagerness, if that were the end. Presently there was a roar of cheers louder than ever before, a roar so loud that it was heard by many of the people in the square, who instantly took it up and shouted themselves hoarse with delight. Under the portico everybody said breathlessly: "*That's the end; it's over now. He'll be here in a minute.*"

The roar of cheers was still sounding when a movement occurred in the vestibule. Down the handsome marble

stairs came a little man, bald-headed, very white of face, and very black of eye, a little, thin, pinched, and vindictive-looking creature with a nose that traced his descent, in one swift unenviable line, to the astutest of all the Israelites who spoiled the Egyptians, or in any case to the first Jew who ever started with nothing, and ended up with everything but a good name. Down he came, running and gesticulating and chattering, his black eyes shining like those of an angry monkey, his red lips—redder for the blackness of his clipped mustache and beard—shining like a clown in a rage, and his little trifling arms pushing and shoving at people in his determination to assert a tremendous importance.

Only a few took any notice of him, and these said to their neighbors, "That's Benjamin Girshel," proud of their knowledge, but too much absorbed in something else for further disquisition on the subject at that particular moment.

The little Jew, who was accompanied by a couple of young and excited stewards in rather stiff frock-coats, with party colors in their buttonholes, and who had clearly gone to the expense of a shampoo for the occasion, having that wonderfully saponaceous appearance associated with the wash-and-brush-up of a barber in a smart line of business, managed to force his way through the crowd under the portico till he came to the steps, where he stood, bare and bald-headed and minute. A roar of cheers, splendidly derisive, greeted his appearance. With the two fussy young brushed-up stewards on one side, and an uncommonly massive policeman of the roast-beef and plum-pudding order, all the burlier for his streaming cape, on the other, Mr. Benjamin Girshel cut a sufficiently comic figure to charm any crowd in the world, but particularly a Lancashire crowd that had waited near two hours in a sousing rain.

While he stood there, consulting with the policeman, looking anxiously at his watch, pointing to the carriage, and flashing his eyes over the almost insoluble congestion of the square, the people started to bawl, "Speech, speech, speech!" laughing, whistling, and waving their caps.

To their amazement and uncontrollable amusement the little creature suddenly raised his head, descended another step or two, and began to shout into the rain and the gas-light and the din of the multitude what had all the animated appearance of a most passionate harangue. Sentences floated out into the night, dissected by laughter and drowned in ironical cheers. On he went, wholly unconscious of the effect he produced, his voice getting hoarser, his arms whirling like washing on a line, his little twisted and bent-up body jumping about in a perfect frenzy of eloquence. "We are not Liberals, my friends," he screamed, "remember that! (Chorus: "We can't forget it!") We are not Liberals, we are Radicals. ("Three cheers for Moses and Aaron!") *Radicals!* ("Go home!") Enemies of the Liberals, if they don't do what we tell them! ("Your head's wet, old cock!") Just as we are enemies of the Tories. ("One more river to cross!") The working classes" (deafening cheers continued for several moments), "the democracy of England ("And Jerusalem, don't forget that!") are waking up ("Liar!")—they are getting on their feet ("Keep off the grass!"), they are opening their lips ("Greedy pigs!"), and they are beginning ("What, only beginning?") to say ("Old clo', old clo'!") that, come what will ("Take it home!"), England shall be free!" (Loud shouts of "Never!" "Who told you?" "Speak for yourself!" "Get your hair cut!" And a loud voice singing in broken English, "Oh where, oh where, is my little wee dog? Oh where, oh where, can he be?"—a chorus ultimately taken up by the surging crowd and sung with most astonishing effect.)

Suddenly, just as the little Jew was about to scream for "Three cheers!" and the policeman, who could scarcely balance himself on the top step for laughter, was turning to the pained and indignant brushed-up stewards to suggest that they had better stop the gentleman, suddenly a sharp and ringing cheer sounded from the interior of the hall; the tall doors were swung open, and a number of policemen and stewards appeared under the portico guarding with elaborate care a small company of ladies and gentlemen. From this inner ring a rather young-looking man of remarkable and even distinguished appearance—he was long-haired and bearded, and bore a singular likeness to Charles Dickens—presently disengaged himself, and advanced alone to the top of the steps, where he took off his hat and stood solemnly confronting the multitude.

At sight of him a shout went up to heaven, although it had no effect upon the rain—a shout full of welcome and acclamation, of gratitude and affection, of worship and rejoicing friendship, the shout of Lancashire expressing its political opinions in homelike welcome.

Mr. Girshel, undismayed that this cheer was not for him, whipped round, and seeing the young man, pointed him out very dramatically to the crowd, as though he had been the first to notice him, and then immediately doubled up the steps like a disturbed cockroach making for the largest crack in the wainscot, and took up his stand beside the hero, excitedly waving his arms for silence in the manner of an amateur conductor passionately endeavoring to make a galloping go-as-you-please orchestra aware of his existence.

The young man turned to him, and said: "Look after my wife. Get her to the carriage. We shall miss the train if we aren't careful."

"I'll see to it," shouted Girshel. "Tell the people the Liberals have got to do what we tell them; mind you

say that. I've just told them: it went like fire." And he plunged into the crowd that was now pressing close behind the hero. "Where's Mrs. Sangster?" he kept shouting. "Mrs. Sangster! Mrs. Sangster! I want her. Where is she?"

A silence almost complete suddenly fell upon the crowd. Maurice Sangster, standing there bare-headed, looked over the multitude to the lighted windows and packed balconies of the square, breathing hard, his eyes shining, one of his hands closing and unclosing at his side, his whole mind strung up to a pitch of incredible excitement. "The first word!" he thought, "the first word! What shall it be?" And the extraordinary silence deepened, the immense crowd became perfectly still, while he stood thinking what he should say.

He took a short step forward, raised his head, and began very solemnly and slowly, the crowd pressing forward to catch every word:

"Gentlemen"—a long pause, full of reverence and expectation—"when a traitor comes to Lancashire"—another pause—"the newspapers next day should record a murder. (Roars of laughter.) Where do you intend to execute me? (Laughter.) Where is the gibbet? (More laughter.) *How long have I got?* (Much more laughter, and a voice, "*They* are the traitors!" followed by tremendous cheers.) But they call me a traitor! ("Let them!") Gentlemen, when we look back upon the history of mankind, what do we see? Is it not Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne? Perhaps I am guilty in their eyes. At any rate they are setting up the scaffold. ("We'll pull it down for you!") I am accused of seeking to split the Party. ("Rot!") They tell me I am playing the Tories' game. ("Not you!") Gentlemen" (a deep silence), "if to insist that the pledge given by the Liberal Party at the last election, the pledge which I gave myself to the people of Bursby, was the pledge of Peace,

Retrenchment, Reform; and if to insist that as men of honor that pledge should be redeemed to the last letter" (loud cheers), "*not* disregarded, *not* abandoned, *not* prodigally and scandalously and traitorously thrown into the waste-paper basket" (loud and continued cheers), "then, gentlemen, then I am indeed a traitor." With tremendous and sudden energy, shooting out his right arm: "This is my message to you, men of Nowdham! Tell your Generals—your Generals, idle and worse than idle in the field—that if they won't lead, if they refuse to order up the guns and to advance against the enemy—tell them that you yourselves—— (Immense and continued cheering, during which the honorable gentleman hurriedly confides rest of the sentence to the nearest reporter.) Gentlemen! (The same eerie silence invariably produced by this most flattering form of address when it is not too hurried), the trumpets have sounded for battle, the banners of victory are unfurled, the army is impatient to advance" (loud cheers), "but our Generals, *our Generals*—where are they? ("Ah!") I will tell you. They are in Doubting Castle. (Cheers.) But *where* in Doubting Castle? Again I will tell you. They are in the chamber of false oaths and perjured honor. ("Hear, hear!") They are tearing up their pledges. (A voice: "Give it them!") They are hiding away the dress they wore when they appeared before the people asking for their votes. ("Hear, hear!") They are collecting dust to throw in the people's eyes! (One long angry roar of furious and maddened rage.) It is for you"—shouting down this roar, with a sudden upward fling of the head and an imperious gesture with the right arm—"it is for you to tell them that you will be deceived no longer!" (Tremendous cheer.)

Mr. Girshel, with his watch in his hand and pushing Mrs. Sangster before him, came to Maurice's side and shouted in his ears: "We can only just do it!" Then

forcing his way to the front, he bawled out: "We are Radicals, not Liberals!" and grinned very horribly on a multitude that was now worked up to such a pitch of excitement that they were not even aware of his appearance.

Phoebe was pushed through the thronging crowd and thrust into the damp carriage, which was now swaying and swinging as if it were only stitched on to its wheels. Maurice followed, with Girshel shoving behind. A policeman just managed to shut the door, and then in the window-spaces appeared dozens of hands, while white exalted faces, contorted with excitement, flashed past those narrow squares of grayness, their staring eyes straining to catch a moment's glimpse of the great demagogue.

The carriage began to move. Girshel thrust out his bald head and shouted at the top of his voice: "Friends, clear a way for him! To the station! Clear a way!"

Maurice slipped his hand through Phoebe's arm, pressed it affectionately, and said to her: "We are winning hands down."

She squeezed his hand to her body by the pressure of her arm, and said: "You were splendid. You never spoke better. I am so proud of you."

Girshel drew in his head. "I prepared the people in the square for you!" he announced, with a hideous grin of self-satisfaction. "The best overflow meeting I have ever seen! I gave them five minutes of lightning. And then you came in with your roll of thunder. Snakes, but we've got the North!"

The carriage could only advance at a walk, and was stopped again and again. People stood on the steps, hung on to the back, and clung to the rail round the coachman's seat. Rough faces were thrust into the carriage, boisterous heartening words of affectionate approval were addressed to Maurice, and a clangor of cheers sounded on every side.

"Make a way for us, my friends," cried Girshel. "Don't

let us miss the train, for God's sake!" He kept turning from side to side, speaking to the people at the window.

They reached the station only just in time for the train, and the crowd swept through the barriers, took possession of the platform, and cheered and waved their caps, and sang "For he's a jolly good fellow" till the train was out of sight.

II

WHEN Tom Fowler advised Maurice Sangster to cultivate a sense of humor and to broaden his mind with the humanity of Charles Dickens, he made a very wise and excellent suggestion, but one which was unfortunately quite fatal to the youthful journalist in question.

Maurice read Dickens with might and with main. He came so thoroughly under the influence of that immortal person as to encourage a Bohemian carelessness in his hair, to grow a mustache and beard, to wear a looser cravat at his collar, and to buy himself a coat and waistcoat of velveteen edged with braid. Further, he took to nocturnal wanderings through the streets of cities, entered into conversation with watermen on cab-ranks, addressed interesting remarks to washerwomen, cross-examined ragamuffins in the gutter, and even went so far as to enter taverns, although he drank nothing stronger than lime-juice, in order that he might get as close as possible to the heart of humanity.

In spite of this enthusiasm his work for the *London Herald* began to suffer. The truth is, he possessed not a particle of humor, and was only telling and convincing when he let himself go as an honest fanatic. His articles suggested to the bewildered Tom Fowler the effort of an Archdeacon to stand on his head in a circus ring, or the

laborious struggles of an overfed elephant to imitate the moonlight adventure of the cow in the nursery rhyme. He wrote to Maurice, and told him bluntly that this kind of thing would never do. Maurice, who was just then arranging that Dr. Mundy should marry him to Phœbe in the following week, was furious. He replied scathingly, and when the letter was posted would have given a thousand pounds to recover it from the post-office. Tom Fowler asked him to call, and Maurice went to see him in a thoroughly crestfallen condition of soul.

The result of that interview was an agreement that Maurice should be released from his engagement, and should be free to write for any other newspapers. The editor of the *London Herald*, in as artful a fashion as can well be imagined, expressed the hope that Mr. Sangster would not forget that the *London Herald* gave him his first start, and would occasionally—*occasionally*—let him see more of his work in his original manner.

Maurice said nothing to Phœbe of this dreadful end to his golden dream. They were quietly married at Dr. Mundy's chapel in the presence of Aunt Mildred, Leonard Champness, and a few of Maurice's chapel friends. Phœbe departed on her honeymoon in her wedding-dress, which was a thoroughly suitable garment, lavender in tone, for an income of seven or eight hundred a year.

Happily Maurice had saved money, and during the honeymoon bride and bridegroom were as blissful and contented as if they had possessed the purse of the unrelenting Mr. Champness. And when, some few weeks after that unforgettable fortnight of delicious happiness, Maurice very tactfully disclosed the true position of his finances, the radiant Phœbe declared that she was perfectly sure they could live on one hundred and fifty pounds a year, his salary from the Political Fund. It was the sweetness and cheerfulness of her acquiescence at the awful moment of

disclosure which made the worried Maurice realize to the utmost the superb and heroic qualities of his wife's mind.

When the first baby was born, to whom Phœbe gave the name of Humphry Leonard Maurice, old Mr. Champness had sufficiently relented as to be present at the baptism; but his very handsome gift of a hundred guineas took the form of a bank account in his godson's name, and neither Maurice nor Phœbe were a penny better off for his condescension.

At the time of the second baby's birth the position of the young couple was really one of considerable embarrassment. Maurice and Phœbe had both exhausted their savings. The expense of a doctor and nurse was a staggering blow; the weekly bills had jumped up by fifteen or sixteen shillings; Phœbe's incapacity necessitated another servant; a small rise in the salary of Maurice went no distance at all to avert catastrophe.

"Don't you think, Maurice dear," Phœbe said to him one evening, as he sat pale and harassed at her bedside, vainly striving to affect interest in the uncommonly small trifle of humanity at her breast who had brought his finances to a kind of Baring Crisis, "that you might go and see papa, and talk about our affairs?"

"Never!"

"You know, dear, you have made no advances."

"I never will."

"But don't you think you might say you were sorry for the words you said that evening which hurt and pained him?"

"What would that mean? It would mean I was after his money. I'd rather starve than be a suppliant for his favor."

"You called him a Pharisee, Maurice dear."

Maurice stood up. "And so he is." The worried young husband, working himself up, began to pace to and fro.

“What does he do for the poor and suffering? Nothing! What does his religion consist of? A formal discharge of traditional duties! Your father, Phœbe, has not got in his heart one single drop of Christian blood. He has never loved. He doesn’t know what love is. Moral? Yes. Righteous? Yes, over-righteous. But love! No! I tell you he is a Pharisee through and through. He is just one of those honest, moral, upright, hard-working, and dutiful formalists to whom the words will be addressed on the Last Day: *‘I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.’*”

She drew her babe nearer to her, tears came into her eyes, and she said: “Is it right, dear, to judge others so harshly? After all, he is a good man.”

“I do not judge him,” retorted Maurice. “The Bible does that for me. Look at his life. Free from sin, but so were the lives of the Pharisees condemned by Christ. Sin may keep a soul out of heaven, but deadness to love plunges a soul into hell. There are too many Pharisees among us. Nonconformity manufactures them by the score. Ask Dr. Mundy; ask Reuben Scarffe. The rich men who patronize Nonconformity, and die leaving huge fortunes behind them, are all Pharisees, damnable Pharisees, enemies of religion, workers of iniquity. I’d rather die than go to your father. My life is to pull such creatures down and trample upon them. I don’t want to kneel to the rich, I want to exalt the humble and meek.”

As it happened an extraordinary change in the fortunes of Maurice occurred during the next week. He had gone to Bursby, where he was very popular, to address an important meeting in favor of the Liberal candidate, who was not the working man desired by Dr. Mundy, but a capitalist of the peg-top order in politics, very much inclined to wobble when the string was withdrawn. Ten minutes before the meeting the Liberal agent said to Maurice, de-

ploring the candidate's unpopularity with the people, and speaking dismally of their prospects at the poll: "Now, if you were to stand, you'd get in easy; they understand you, and your style of speaking suits them; but this chap dawdles along for an hour, saying nothing and meaning nothing—they can see through that."

The candidate himself was among the speakers at the meeting; the chairman was a local employer; the ladies and gentlemen on the platform were representative of provincial comfort and respectability. Maurice sat at some little distance from the chairman's table, his eyes never wandering from the working-class audience before him, his hands never moving to applaud, his lips never opening to cheer or encourage the other speakers. His pallor deepened and his eyes brightened as the speakers hemmed and hawed, stammered and halted, became involved even in the dreariest platitudes, and meandered on to a tame end.

When the chairman rose and said that he was now going to call upon an old friend, the audience burst into a grateful cheer of relief, and turned their faces towards Maurice, smiling very cheerfully. But Maurice did not smile. His brain was on fire, his blood was racing through his veins, he saw nothing before him but a mist that swirled and vibrated like the vapors of a furnace. He rose to his feet like a soldier called to attention. The first words he uttered loosed the feelings of the audience and changed the whole temper of the meeting. "Does it matter to you," he demanded angrily, "whether you are fooled by a Tory or a Liberal? Haven't you been fooled long enough? Don't you want to get something done? Something that will make your lives happier?" Then, swinging round with hot indignation to the candidate, he demanded: "What are you going to do for the homes, the women, the children, the lives of these poor people confronting you?"

The result of that historic meeting, after protracted nego-

tiations at London headquarters, was the resignation of the wobbling capitalist and the adoption of Maurice Sangster as the official Liberal candidate. Reuben Scarffe in Bursby, and Dr. Mundy in London, saved the situation and prevented a three-cornered contest. Moreover, that meeting recovered for Maurice his position on the *London Herald*. He went straight back from the platform to Scarffe's house, and wrote the first of a series of articles entitled "Radicalism," which created a sensation about equal to his original articles on the condition of Bursby.

He was returned by an overwhelming majority. He entered the House of Commons as a recognized Radical, and took his place on the Liberal benches among the severest critics of the Liberal Government. He was chilled by the House of Commons, irritated by its procedure, and appalled by its worldliness. His first speech was entirely fanatical, and discomfited even the advanced Radicals. His second speech emptied the House.

In spite of this failure he worked excessively hard and never lost heart. He foresaw earlier than anyone else that Liberalism must either become Radicalism or perish; he prophesied a Labor Party; he insisted that Socialism would be the character of all the parties in the State before the end of the century. In a year's time he had made himself a nuisance to the Government, and was in high favor with the Tories. He had been a Member of Parliament for over a year when he met one evening at a Liberal Club the little gentleman of the Jewish persuasion introduced to the reader in the last chapter. This diminutive Hebrew was an exceedingly rich man. His wealth was derived from three principal sources—to wit, a swindling Syrup advertised to cure every conceivable illness arising from the stomach; a five shillings and elevenpence halfpenny corset guaranteed to give comfort and preserve the figure—very popular among ladies of the reduced middle-classes; and a patent feeding

bottle for babies, which probably polished off in a month more unfortunate infants in manufacturing towns with a form of dysentery, which the disgusted Syrup absolutely refused to cure, than were slaughtered by Herod with his infinitely more merciful sword.

The hobby of this extremely energetic and successful little parasite was Socialism—not the elegant and graceful and scholarly Socialism which became rather fashionable in later years with High Church curates and Ruskin-minded gentlemen on the sixpenny reviews, but a good, honest, atheistical, class-hating, and monarchy-detesting Socialism of the Continental description. To Benjy Girshel, as his intimates affectionately termed him, everything in life was so monstrously wrong that any labor in the tinkering line filled him with a perfectly passionate rage. The thing to do was to pull everything down and start afresh. It was waste of time to go pottering round a wreckage of antiquated machinery with an oil-can and a spanner. “Scrap it,” he said, “scrap the whole boiling, and start bang off with a new pattern.”

So far Mr. Girshel had circulated his opinions and himself in an unmistakably humble orbit of society. It was not until he was elected a member of a very charitably committed club, which expressed Liberal opinions in a diversity of tongues and accents, that he began to feel his feet as a politician. But even here he was obliged to circulate among the smaller shopkeepers and tradesmen, his appearance more than his opinions and his manners inspiring coldness in the higher circles of the club. A lucky acquaintance with a middle-aged, purple-faced journalist, whose command of strong language was perhaps slightly, but only slightly, excelled by his capacity for carrying strong beverages, and whose Socialistic soul was embittered by the knowledge that he earned most of his guineas from Conservative journals of a very Jingo inflation, and who

spent the greater part of his day in the smoking-room of this easy club in the hope of waylaying some innocent Liberal editor, possibly not yet aware of his literary abilities—chance acquaintance, we say, with this mildewed and moth-eaten journalist led the way for Mr. Girshel to a more definitely political connection. The journalist knew people; people, indeed, paid for the greater quantity of alcohol he consumed. Some of them liked him even. Step by step Girshel advanced, but never got into even the most distant communication with the gentlemen of the party. He started a weekly newspaper, at the suggestion of the mildewed journalist, but with no better success. They both held the opinion that somebody or other was holding back progress and enslaving democracy; and although democracy refused to buy their paper on a scale that attracted advertisers, they still maintained that the whole fault was entirely due to this tyrannical Somebody or Other. Girshel practically lived at the club. He was always running up and down the stairs, popping his head into the various rooms, sidling up to famous people, sitting down sometimes—so irrepressible was his audacity—beside a group of distinguished people, listening to their conversation with a benign smile, until they saw him, rose, and left the room, when he would dart after one of them, touch his coat-sleeve, wink, and utter some remark of a humorous and ingratiating nature; in fact, literally cadging for acquaintance. Mr. Girshel did everything he could possibly do to make himself thoroughly disliked, to get himself talked about with a very vigorous disapproval, and to insure his being regarded by every sensible person in the club as a vulgar little cad of a fellow and a most unmitigated nuisance.

In spite of this, he came at last, by “a long persistency of purpose,” to make friends with two or three Members of Parliament, genuine Radicals and extremely needy citi-

zens, whom he first flattered and afterwards patronized till he was in a position to dismiss them from his favor. The one man he liked, and the one man he stuck to, was Maurice Sangster, the young and burning Member for Bursby, whose dramatic entrance into politics had filled him with enthusiasm. In Maurice, Mr. Girshel assured himself that he had found a star to which he might hitch, with only ordinary care, the wagon of his dreams—that wagon loaded with dynamite and nitro-glycerine, expressly made ready for the British Constitution and the English aristocracy. He fastened himself on to Maurice one night at the club, carried him off to dinner at his large house in the Finchley Road, and did not let him go until some time after midnight, when a compact had been made between them.

Maurice was to write for Mr. Girshel's paper a weekly diary, to be called "The Notebook of a Radical M.P." Mr. Girshel was to pay him ten pounds a week for his contribution. Further, Maurice was to edit a penny library of Radicalism for Mr. Girshel, for which service he was to receive two hundred a year. And further still, Maurice was told that he could count upon Mr. Girshel for any sum of money not exceeding one hundred and fifty pounds a year for his expenses in stumping the country as a genuine out-and-out Radical.

This arrangement, while it did not in any way tie the hands of Maurice, nor yet reflect upon his honor, freed him from a difficulty in his relations with the Connexion which had begun to irk him. With all his influence, Dr. Mundy could not turn the tide of angry criticism which was sweeping towards the Member for Bursby. Maurice received a great many annoying letters. Certain ministers did not scruple to inform him that he was receiving the wages of Liberalism to fight the battle of Toryism. In fact, the more he showed his colors as a Radical and delighted his constituents, the more he displeased the religious people in Lon-

don, who so largely enabled him to represent those constituents in the House of Commons.

Girshel solved that problem and many another.

As Maurice grew in audacity and in power, Girshel became a more liberal paymaster. He took Maurice about the country, paid all his expenses, and organized gigantic meetings for him. He grew so enthusiastic at last that he told Maurice to call upon him at any time for any sum of money he might require.

And now, when Maurice had moved the adjournment of the House, charging the Government with perfidy and very nearly defeating it, Girshel had carried him off on a campaign that was to sweep the country for out-and-out Radicalism at the next General Election.

"You stick to me, my boy," Benjy said to him, "and I'll make you the Prime Minister of England."

III

OLD Mrs. Sangster opened the little glass-paneled door of the parlor and entered the shop for the third time during the last quarter of an hour. Old Mr. Sangster was sitting on a low stool behind the counter, close up to the bow-window, reading a newspaper by the light of a single and overworked gas-jet, intended to attract observation to the window and to illuminate the little interior, a double duty which it executed with a very imperfect success. The shop being two steps below the level of the earth's surface, was rather darker than most, particularly on a winter's evening.

"I wonder when to goodness they are coming, if they intend to come at all!" ejaculated old Mrs. Sangster, advancing into the shop, and taking up a central position.

She was short and she was circular—a little choleric old body in a black net, a black serge, a black apron, with mittens on her hands, and a pair of little old spectacles on her nose. If her boots had been visible, one would have seen that they were of the pull-on elastic order, with shiny toecaps. “They said half-past four,” she continued, resting one hand on the counter, the other arm lying along her waist, as if it had grown up in a splint—“they said half-past four, and I prepared for half-past four. It’s now twenty to five, every minute of it, and not a sign of them.”

Old Mr. Sangster, a tall, thin, scholarly and benevolent old gentleman, rather like John Stuart Mill, something like Edward FitzGerald, and occasionally like Herbert Spencer, but with less austerity in the upper lip, and possibly with less enormous wealth of learning in the upper story, but certainly a deal more of whimsical humor in the eyes, turned his head round, lowered it, looked over his spectacles, and said “My love!” very reprovably, and then again “My love!” very encouragingly. But Mrs. Sangster remained adamant.

“There’s the hot buttered toast, that was crisp and golden ten minutes ago, turning to leather under my very eyes!” she said, not moving an inch, all her energy in her utterance. “I’ve no patience,” she continued, “with people who say one thing and do the contrary.”

“Oh, hush, hush!” cried the old gentleman, getting up on his slippers, and flinging down his paper on the counter. “Why, that’s exactly what he charges the Government with—the identical charge! For mercy’s sake, my dear love, my dear, dear love, do be careful of your words!”

“Oh, it wouldn’t be you if you couldn’t have your little joke, although it is your birthday, would it? But if you could have seen the buttered toast ten minutes ago——”

“Buttered toast!” he exclaimed, laughing, throwing up

his hands in affected despair. "Can't the woman see the absurdity of bringing buttered toast into any sort or kind of relation with the British Constitution? Your son, my poor, good, stupid old woman, is a Member of Parliament! Don't you know what that means? Why, he's managing—think of it!—managing the British Empire." Scratching his gray whiskers, and they were whiskers that emitted a sharp, irritable, frictional tone when so treated, the old gentleman proceeded: "Look at India, for instance: three hundred million of poor, ignorant people who don't know their right hand from their left; he's looking after them. Look at the Board of Trade: millions and millions and millions of pounds of revenue returns; he's looking after that, too. Think of it! And you talk of buttered toast! Go along—you and your buttered toast! And if the toast is spoilt, haven't you got shrimps in a glass dish, water-cresses in another glass dish, and bloater paste in a pot, raspberry jam in a china jar with a gold handle, and loaves that were warm when the baker left them not an hour ago?" He came round the counter, put his arm about the waist of his little wife, stooped down to her ear, and said very teasingly: "You and your old buttered toast! I've a good mind to send that up to the *London Herald*."

She answered, angrier than ever for the embrace, but not driving the old gentleman away: "Well, *he* said half-past four, and *she* said half-past four; the two of them said it. I suppose they know their own mind. *I* didn't name the hour. I had nothing to do with it at all. If people say a thing, they should do it. They ought to think of others. They ought to think of the inconvenience they cause to busy people."

"Think of *him*, Mrs. Sangster, think of *him*!" said the incorrigible old man, stooping again. "Future Prime Minister of England! Queen Victoria's greatest comfort in her old age. She and he sitting together in Buckingham

Palace and Balmoral Castle, putting their heads together, and saying: 'Let's do this, and let's do that!' and always worrying what they can do for the poor. Think of him taking the Turkish yoke off the Christian population of the Balkans! Think of him pouring the balm of Gilead into Ireland's broken heart! Think of him teaching the French Frogs to behave themselves! Think of him giving the Russian Bear a poke in the eye when it pops its ugly old head over the Himalaya Mountains, all covered in snow! Think of him taking down the Church of England! Think of him reducing the National Debt! Think of him making the rascally landlords wish that he'd never been born—never been born, mind you, born here in Back Street, Derby! Why, old lady, if I remember right, *you* had something to do with that little affair, surely, surely! Come, isn't that the case, or am I wandering in my wits?"

"There's no reason to think he'll be Prime Minister just because he has got into Parliament," said the old lady, stoutly and scornfully. "Why, there's hundreds of them, and you know that as well as I do. All of them can't be Prime Ministers!"

"Go along with you, you and your old buttered toast!" he laughed, and taking his arm from her waist, placing the tips of his fingers just inside the pockets of his trousers, and kicking out his slippered feet, the tall old gentleman made an elaborate and hilarious attempt at swaggering to and fro in his very small shop.

"It's ten minutes to five, I'll be bound it is!" said Mrs. Sangster, taking no notice of him.

"Nothing like it!" he said over his shoulder. "Nothing like it!" He laughed and swaggered till his spectacles slipped to the end of his nose. "Nor yet a quarter. No, not the quarter even. I'm sure it isn't. Two shrimps to a piece of buttered toast it isn't!"

At that moment there was a sound of wheels outside,

and the lamps of a carriage flickered over the moisture on the many panes of the bow-window, and came to a crawling stop opposite the door.

"They're here!" he cried, shooting out his hand to the latch.

"Come at last," she grumbled, smoothing her apron and adjusting her comical little spectacles. "Well, it's about time they did."

The bell suspended on the back of the door set up a fine jingle as old Mr. Sangster lifted the latch and gave it a quick jerk inwards. The little shop, filled with so many things in the stationery line that nobody wanted, and so few things in the fancy line that people did occasionally ask for and want very much, but in such a hurry that they couldn't leave an order, or wouldn't; the little shop, with newspapers on the counter, its dilapidated library on the shelves, and a miserable display of china ornaments with the arms of Derby, and candlesticks, sealing-wax trays, and dogs in metal, set out in the window—the little shop became all of a sudden quite bright and cheerful and prosperous, as if a troop of fairies or school children had poured into it, and given an order for a thousand pounds. Phœbe entered first, but Maurice was pressing close behind, his hands on her arms, his face smiling over her shoulder.

"What a jolly sound!" he exclaimed. "That old bell on the door! Dad, how are you? Mummy dear—dear little mummy!"

They all embraced, and old Mr. Sangster, laughing heartily, was just turning to close the door upon the outer world when Maurice stopped him.

"Why, what's the matter, lad?" cried the old gentleman.

"One moment!" said Maurice, detaining him. "A friend of mine is coming in, just to shake a hand with you. He won't stay."

At that moment Girshel appeared in the doorway. He

was wearing a cloth cap pulled very much down over his eyes, and a comfortable, loose-fitting frieze overcoat. Between his red lips was an over-big cigar, cocked up in American fashion towards the right eye.

"Well," said he, coming suddenly and lightly down the two steps which for over a hundred years now had precipitated many unwary customers into the middle of the shop. "I'm pleased to meet you." He offered his right hand, holding his cigar in the left. "Son has often spoken of you. Feel I've known you all my life. Very good son. Dutiful. Don't forget the old folks at home, does he?"

"I didn't quite catch your name, sir?" inquired old Mr. Sangster, stooping down, very eager not to lose a syllable of some great and distinguished name in the Liberal Party.

"Girshel," said the Jew, putting the cigar back into his mouth—"Benjamin Girshel. Ever heard of Girshel's Syrup? That's me!" He glanced at old Mrs. Sangster, winked at her, and said: "You've got 'em on!"

The old lady straightened her back and stared indignantly.

"I can see you have. Lord bless you, ma'am! I can tell them anywhere. They pitch rather high, and sit very stiff over the hips, don't they? I see 'em in trams, omnibuses, and railway-carriages. I see 'em in the streets of every city and town I visit; I see 'em everywhere, and I can recognize 'em at once."

"What to goodness does the man mean!" ejaculated old Mrs. Sangster, glancing from her mystified husband to Maurice, then picking up Phœbe's hand, drawing it through her arm, and standing very rigid and oppugnant.

Girshel laughed and grinned. "Five and elevenpence halfpenny!" he said. "You know! Guaranteed to give comfort and preserve the figure!"

"What!" cried old Mrs. Sangster. "The man isn't never talking of my stays, is he?"

"That's me, too!" said Girshel with another grin. "Glad to see you know a good article when it is offered to you!" And, turning to old Mr. Sangster, he said, "Rather a quiet business, eh?" jerking his head to indicate that he spoke of the shop.

"Well, it has a leaning that way, sir," smiled the old man.

"Not much doing?"

"Not what you could call very much, except at Christmas-time and just before Valentine's Day. Never a roaring trade, it isn't, and never was. We have always had time to be careful in giving change."

"Old-fashioned premises, eh? Not a particularly good street—dark, narrow, too far from a main road. How many copies of my sixpenny do you sell, I wonder? Not two a week, I'll be bound! You want more gas-lamps outside, and more illumination within. Light catches the people same as moths. The future of trade is illumination. Look at that one old gas-jet over there! No good at all!"

Old Mr. Sangster laughed and rubbed his hands. "Pardon me, sir," he said, in a very knowing, confidential and whimsical way, washing his hands, bobbing his head, and blinking his eyes—"pardon me, but the light happens to be a particular dodge of mine. It doesn't light the window too much! You see, it induces people to come into the shop to see what they're buying, and it sends them out again without knowing what they have bought!"

Girshel laughed mirthfully. He took the old shopkeeper's jest in earnest, and applauded as a piece of sharp practice what was really nothing more than a harmless pretense at knowingness on the part of a transparently honest and simple old man.

"Well"—looking round again—"I won't keep you. Just thought I'd like to see the home of the great man, and shake hands with his dad and his mum. Most interesting,

I'm sure. Here was born, and here was reared, the future Prime Minister of England. Wonderful! I'll put a tablet over the door for you. Later on we'll stick his bust in a niche, with plenty of gas to show it up at night. Well, good-by to you."

"I've got upstairs," announced old Mrs. Sangster very solemnly, "the bed he was born on, the first robe as ever he wore, the cradle he laid in, and some of his small clothes."

"You don't say so!"

"Would you like to see them?"

"Not this evening, ma'am, thanks all the same—another time. Most interesting, I'm sure—destined one day to figure either in Westminster Abbey or Madame Tussaud's. Certainly!" Then with a wink, "See he don't eat too big a tea, and spoil his speech to-night! No, I won't stay. Good-by to you—good-by!"

"That's a card!" laughed old Mr. Sangster, when the door was shut. "Oh, I like him! He's a real card. Sharp as a pin. What is he, lad?"

"Well, he's a Jew, isn't he?" said old Mrs. Sangster. "I could see that in a moment. Nasty little impertinent creature, I call him! Talking about my stays before gentlemen, and him a perfect stranger! I never did in all my life! But come along. I had a beautiful tea all ready for you twenty minutes ago. I hope it isn't spoilt, that's all. You *said* half-past four. We thought it was early, but the both of you said it. Come along in."

When they had entered the parlor and shut the door, and while old Mrs. Sangster was bringing the kettle from the hob, Maurice said to his father: "You think I've forgotten, dad! I know you do. Mother thinks so, too. You both think I've forgotten."

"Forgotten what, lad?" asked the old man, pretending not to know.

"I said you wouldn't," quoth old Mrs. Sangster, pouring boiling water into the teapot.

"Well, now, before we sit down," said Maurice, "I'll prove to you that I haven't forgotten. First, I arranged three weeks ago that I should be in Derby on this very day. Second, I arranged that a carriage should come here at a quarter to eight on purpose to carry you both to my meeting. Third, I arranged that the three best seats in the front row should be reserved for you two and for Phœbe. But wait—I haven't done yet. I'm going to prove to you, not only that I know it's your birthday, but that I know the exact number of years the world has been the better for your presence in it!"

"Now, do sit down," cried old Mrs. Sangster. "Make your speech afterwards. The hot buttered toast has been standing twenty minutes and more."

"Let it wait two minutes longer, mum!" cried Maurice, and produced from the pocket of his overcoat a heavy canvas bag tied at the neck with pink tape.

He pushed a plate out of his way, loosened the tape, causing a pleasant clinking sound to issue from the interior of the bag, and then emptied the contents on to the white table-cloth.

"Goodness to gracious!" ejaculated old Mrs. Sangster.

"Lord have mercy on us!" cried old Mr. Sangster very piously.

"Count them!" cried Maurice. "Count them!"

"Now, for pity's sake," said the old lady, in a high state of apprehension, glancing in perfect terror towards the glass-paneled door, "hide them away, do! Hide them! You never know who'll come into the shop. It's tempting Providence. Hide them away, I tell you!"

"Lord!" said old Mr. Sangster; "I can't see them clearly, and I feel all of a twitter. You count 'em. God bless my soul! I never saw such a sight in my born days!"

He turned away from the table, put his two hands on Phoebe's shoulders, drew her to him very gently, and laid his head against her cheek.

"I'm so glad it has made you happy," she said, kissing him and fondling him.

Into her ear he whispered cunningly: "Are you sure he can afford it? Why, it's a fortune! Won't it pinch him? You've got children, mind you!"

Maurice dragged at his arm. "Come, dad, I insist that you count them. Sit down to the table, quick. Mum's getting impatient."

"Ah, there's that hot buttered toast of hers; we mustn't forget that!" laughed the old man, and he sat down with alacrity. "My blessed word!" he exclaimed; "a heap of gold sovereigns, all new, every one of them! Why, it's like a miracle!"

"I wish you'd put them away," snapped the old lady. "I'm not thinking of the buttered toast now; I'm thinking of murderers and thieves." She turned to Phoebe and related terrible incidents of till robberies and garrotings and ruffianism of the worst order. "It's not safe to live here, now that the children have left us," she said. "I tell you that sometimes when the shop-bell rings of a dark night, I feel as if my heart would jump out of my mouth. It's awful, it's terrible, sitting here waiting while your dad-in-law goes to see who it is. I'm sure it's taking years off my life!" She threw up her hands and turned up her eyes. "But, my dear, there's another matter. What about this grand meeting to-night? You don't want to go with us, I'm sure. We haven't got the clothes for it. You see, we're very old, quiet people, and we don't go anywhere except to chapel of a Sabbath, and perhaps once a week to prayer-meeting."

"Why, I'm longing, just longing to sit with you!" said Phoebe, embracing her again. "You're his mother! Think

how proud I shall be sitting next to his mother! I shall hold your hand all the time!"

"You mean that? You're certain of it? Mind, I shouldn't be offended. I know that in the Lord's sight we're all equal, but while we're on the earth, left to ourselves, as you might say, dress can't be put on one side. Dad has got a better coat upstairs, and his Sunday hat when I've put the iron over it will look as good as any; but, my dear, I've got nothing better than a three years old black alpaca, trimmed with silk insertion, and my bonnet's more than a year old, and my mantle is very shabby now, with some of the jet missing——"

"How many are there?" demanded Maurice.

"Sixty-seven, lad. I make it so. Sixty-seven."

"And how old are you, dad?"

"The Lord bless my soul, sixty-seven this very day!"

"One for every year," laughed Maurice, clapping his father on the back. "Look, mum, one for every year of his dear old life! Doesn't that prove I knew it was his birthday before I came? Put them away, dad; into the bag with them, and then let's get to work at mum's buttered toast."

When the old man had put the sovereigns back into the bag, he got slowly up from his chair, weighing the bag in his right hand, solemnly and gravely, tears in his eyes, and went first to Phœbe, kissing her on both cheeks, then to Maurice, kissing his forehead, and then to his wife, thrusting the bag into her hands—all without a word. Then he walked to the little glass-paneled door, opened it, and passed into the shop.

"Ask a blessing, lad," said old Mrs. Sangster, "He'll be back in a moment or two. I haven't seen him taken like that for years."

They sat down and began to eat.

In a few minutes the door opened again, and the old man

entered, smiling and awkward. "How's the hot buttered toast, Phœbe? How is it? Oh, you should have heard her carrying on about that old buttered toast of hers before you came!" He sat down, lifted his cup, spilling some of his tea, his hand was shaking so, and drank noisily, a tear escaping from the rim of his spectacles and sliding into the cup.

Maurice began to hold forth. His pale face was flushed and his dark eyes were bright, as though the heat of the little room had boiled him into a fever. Oh, but how he loved that room—the wool mats, the antimacassars, the polished furniture, the stuffiness, the familiar smells! He said to them: "When the door opened, and I heard the bell ring, why, I could have burst into tears! What memories it woke in my heart! Yes, that old bell on the door! Why didn't Poe put the bell of the little shop into his poem? Think of them, all over the world, tinkling and jangling, letting in the wind with a rush, the rain with a swish, and bringing custom and hope to the old people in the little parlor at the back! Sometimes they ring gently, nervously, half afraid of what's coming, and a little maid creeps in, asking for change, or an old woman who can't see the step clearly, and pulls angrily at her dog by its string. Isn't that so, dad? Sometimes they ring cheerfully and heartily, and a good, honest body enters, prepared to pay cash and carry off what she buys—yes, and to stop for a few minutes of pleasant chat. And sometimes they ring loudly and alarmingly—someone in a hurry for something you haven't got, or a neighbor with bad news, or the postman with letters from the scattered children, the children who hear in their dreams all over the world the tinkle of the little bell. Isn't that true, dad? You tell us, you two, tell Phœbe and me what the bell means to you—its different sounds, changing with the seasons of the year—and what hopes it creates in your hearts. Why, you could write a

book about it! Write a book, dad, about the history of your shop-bell! I remember it excited me on summer nights, and terrified me on winter nights. I remember, too, how I used to lie in bed telling myself stories in which the bell played a part. It used to ring splendidly in my stories, far finer than the bell of the muffin-man; and a tall, handsome stranger used to enter, dressed in superbest manner—Russian sables, a squash hat, and white kid gloves—and he used to ask if a boy named Maurice Sangster happened by any chance to live there; and in another two minutes—what do you think?—why, I had succeeded to a million of money, was giving orders for a castle, and a yacht, and no end of horses, and no end of carriages, and I was carrying you all off, the whole lot of you, to see the wide world. My word, how I dreamed!”

Phoebe, leaning across the table, said softly: “You won’t excite yourself, Maurice dear, will you? Remember you’ve got this big speech to make to-night.”

“Good girl!” cried old Mr. Sangster. “That’s how it should be—the wife looking after the husband, and seeing that he behaves reasonably. Maurice, the shrimps are looking at you.”

“I think he’s terribly thin,” pursued old Mrs. Sangster. “I know he works hard, and must have a deal to worry him. Still, for all that, he oughtn’t to look so peaky. I’m sure he oughtn’t. He *never* used to look like it, anyway. He was a hearty eater and enjoyed his food. He was always thin, and his complexion was never anything but pale; still, nobody would have called him delicate in those days—*nobody!*” Then she turned to Phoebe, and said: “Why don’t you make him shave off that beard and mustache? I liked him best when he hadn’t got anything on his face.”

Just at this moment the bell rang in the shop.

“Goodness!” cried old Mrs. Sangster, sitting back sud-

denly, pressing her left hand to her heart, and staring fearfully towards the door.

"All right, old lady, nobody isn't going to knock me on the head!" laughed the shopkeeper, getting up. He bowed to Phoebe, and said: "You'll excuse me, my dear, won't you? A business appointment! The demands of commerce. You understand?"

The customer banged on the counter.

"There, you feel safe now, don't you?" laughed the old fellow, winking at his wife. "It's no murderer this time, nor yet a shop-lifter. Perhaps it's Lord Rothschild come to buy the *Times*. You've heard that joke, Maurice, haven't you? Very good—very good indeed!"

He was absent for a long time. While he was away old Mrs. Sangster rose repeatedly and looked over the curtain of the parlor door. "It's a lady," she said, on the first occasion. "Still, you never know in these days."

Maurice talked of old times, and told Phoebe many a story of his childhood, suggested by the furniture.

When the newsagent returned, he was holding his watch in his left hand. "Eight minutes," he said. "Yes, eight minutes exactly—that's how long it took us to suit her. And here's the result." He opened his right hand and exposed two coppers in the palm. "Notepaper!" he said. "A tuppenny packet of notepaper! No envelopes; she had some at home—half a packet or more. It had to be gray. Oh, very particular about that! Not too green; a little green, but not too much of it, and just a soft—oh, the very softest touch of blue in it! I think she must be corresponding through a matrimonial office with an eligible gent of middle-life and domestic habits."

"Ah! what do you think of these new-fangled matrimonial agencies, lad?" demanded old Mrs. Sangster, with asperity. "Why don't you have them put down by Parliament, the wicked, blasphemous things! As if the Lord

intended His creatures to advertise themselves into holy wedlock! What sort of children are going to come out of marriages like that?"

"But what's tuppence," demanded old Sangster, "when I've got a fortune of sixty-seven brand-new sovereigns in the cupboard? Old lady, do you know what I mean to do? Why, the first fine Bank Holiday that comes along, I'm going to take you to Dovedale."

"Oh, I'm too old for a journey like that!" said Mrs. Sangster.

So they chatted and laughed, and ate the fine tea till it was nothing but a wreck; and then old Mr. Sangster returned thanks, and Phœbe and the old lady cleared away and did the washing-up together in a little scullery at the back, while father and son sat together in front of the fire.

Maurice said to him, in a low voice full of affection: "You didn't see me, but I passed this shop-window three or four times this afternoon."

"You did? Never! Why, what do you mean, lad?"

"We arrived before noon," answered Maurice. "I arranged it on purpose. I wanted to be alone. I wanted to see the old place quite by myself. I left Phœbe with Girshel at the hotel, and started out directly after luncheon. What a day I've had! I've been all over the old ground—over every bit of it. I walked round the school, went to the chapel, passed the houses of my friends, paid a visit to the old sweet-and-toy shop at the corner, found my way through courts and alleys without a single mistake, and got as far as the cemetery. Do you remember my little school-friend, Willie Trenchard? Well, I went to see his grave." His eyes shone and his voice shook. He was feeling the drama of his life, deeply and sharply. "I stood over it till I was a boy again," he said quietly. "And then it came to me, dear Lord—but it was as real as anything in the world—that one day I shall be lying cold and rigid,

that someone will dig a hole in the ground for *me*”—he smote his breast—“that *I* shall be let down into the darkness, and that earth will be thrown on top of me till I am pressed deep down out of sight. I thought to myself: ‘Before that happens, the Lord helping me, I’ll do something to make the world a better place!’ Dad, have you ever felt like that? I thought of the men who die bad, who are laid in the grave after long lives of selfish beastliness and sin; I thought of their souls rising on the Last Day to confront the Judge of all men! How can men live like that? Dad, do you know that Parliament is made up of libertines, rascals, and humbugs? It’s true; on my soul it’s true. You should see them in the lobby, in the smoking-room, on the terrace! You can count the men on the fingers of one hand who really know how the poor suffer, and who really want to alter the conditions of life which produce misery, sickness, crime, poverty, and ignorance. Wait till you hear me to-night! I’ve improved my speech by my walk this afternoon. I recalled my whole childhood; I realized the sufferings of the poor people who surrounded me then; I saw how wickedly and cruelly the laws of this country had oppressed them. I vowed myself afresh to God’s service.”

He was interrupted by the shop-bell. He sank back into his chair, breathing rather hard, and covered his face with his hands, thinking of life and death, God, the soul, and the speech he was to make that night.

As he sat waiting for his father, he looked round about him at the little parlor, remembering vividly incidents of his childhood which had almost faded from his mind. He touched things. He told himself that he could very easily cry. He wanted someone to come and hear him talk.

He could understand now the courage and the self-sacrifice of his parents; how they had toiled from morning to night that the children might have clothes and food!

What infinite pains they had taken to bring the children up in that wholesome fear of the Lord which saves young souls from perilous sins! And now they were alone in the little old shop, these two parents, these two very old poor people, just guarding an empty nest.

The door opened quietly, and old Mr. Sangster slipped mysteriously into the parlor, closing the door behind him with an air of secrecy.

"It's rather awkward, Maurice lad," he whispered, coming to his son's side, and bending down to his ear. "We've got here in Derby one of those regular Romanizing priests; goes about in a long gown and a queer cap all corners; he's outside now, in the shop; says he has only just heard that I am the father of Mr. Maurice Sangster, and wants to know whether I can get him into the meeting; says he'll be engaged till the last moment, and fears that he might not be able to get a seat. Now, what am I to say, lad? I don't want to insult the man."

Maurice produced a card from his pocket. "What's his name?" he asked.

"Father Something, but I really forget. Shall I ask him?"

"No; it doesn't matter."

He wrote on the card: "Admit bearer to platform," and gave it to his father. "Don't be long," he said, "I like to sit with you, here by the old fire."

IV

SOME people think that to the end of his life Maurice never made a better speech than he made that night at Derby. It was, in any case, the speech that determined his career. Hitherto the London newspapers had either ignored him or treated him to a paragraphic mutilation.

But the speech was remarkable enough to impress nearly all the principal editors; it was printed with astonishing fullness. Some of the more daring newspapers ventured a careful comment in leading articles. Afterward, word for word, it was published by the *London Herald* as a pamphlet. Radicalism seemed to be getting on its feet.

Old Sangster was right when he turned to Phœbe at the end and said: "I feel as if I'd been in chapel, listening to a sermon—but the very best sermon I ever heard." For in this speech Maurice made no attack upon the Government, indulged in no violent criticism of the Opposition, scarcely, indeed, mentioned the word "politics." He spoke as a poor man to poor men, as one who had been drowning with them in deep waters, but now had lifted his head above the waves and had discerned across the darkness and tempest the sunlit hills of a better world. When he mentioned politicians, it was to speak of them with something almost like Christian charity, as of men who did not know, who could not understand, who had never experienced the griefs of the multitude. Not by fighting would come the great victory desired by all good men, but by enlightened sympathy; there can be no Millennium, he said, till the fellowship of humanity is the wish of the world.

While the audience were cheering at the end of the speech—which had disappointed those who came to shout "Give it 'em!" and taken the wind out of the sails of those who came to interrupt and heckle—old Mr. Sangster leaned his lips to the ear of old Mrs. Sangster, who was sitting stiff and forward, her spectacles shining in the gaslight, her matronly bosom, protected by the five and elevenpence halfpenny, bursting with pride, and said to her: "You see these young fellows just in front of us, writing as if their lives depended on it? They're sending your son's speech over the telegraph wire to every city of any consequence in the whole world. You and your old buttered toast!"

"I believe you're right, Peter," she rejoined, "though you're always wrong as a rule."

"What do you mean? Right about what?"

"Making him the Prime Minister. Lord send that we live to see the day!"

The old couple waited with Phœbe while the great audience was dispersing. They stood by their seats, watching the people on the platform who crowded round Maurice to shake his hand and congratulate him. They missed nothing, these two old people. They talked about it for months afterwards. He was the center of the world.

"Oh dear, look!" said old Mrs. Sangster, bridling up. "There's that nasty little fat-nosed creature of a Jew up there. I hope he won't say anything to any of the gentle people about my stays, the vulgar little creature! nor yet come down here making any of his indecent remarks. I ought to have smacked his face for him in the shop this afternoon. Taking liberties like that!"

She turned to Phœbe and asked her how she could encourage such a hideous little sinner, and why Maurice took up with such a little brat.

Old Mr. Sangster was saying to himself:

"They all want to know him. They all want to shake his hand. It's enough to turn a man's head—some of the biggest men in the town!"

Maurice at last broke free from his admirers, but not before many of the gas-jets had been lowered by a non-political porter anxious to go home and get to bed. He strode away to the back of the platform. In the shadow close to the stairs which led below, someone stood waiting. Maurice glanced up rather impatiently, and was about to push past when the man leaned forward, and said:

"I should like to thank you for so kindly giving me your card this afternoon—and for your speech."

The face of the man was so interesting, his smile was so

pleasant, his voice was so exceedingly good-natured and attractive, that Maurice stopped. Before a speech he was always excitable and elated; afterwards, cold, distant, silent, and reserved.

"I enjoyed your speech so much," said the priest. "I couldn't see you, for I was here at the back, but I could watch the audience, and I could hear every word you said."

"You sympathize with our ideas?" Maurice asked.

"Very much."

"As a rule one associates the parsons——"

"Oh, but you mustn't do that. We are waking up, too."

"You are not opposed to disestablishment?"

"Not in the least; I should welcome it."

"But disendowment?"

"Have you gone into that question yourself?"

"No."

"It's rather a difficult one. But I mustn't keep you." He put out his hand. "Many thanks indeed. Please tell your father how much I enjoyed the speech, what pleasure it gave me to watch his enthusiasm, and how very much indebted I feel myself to him. Good-by. Perhaps we shall meet again."

Maurice was finding his way from the lower regions to the hall, when one of the great men of Derby, overtaking him, said:

"I saw you talking to Father Prague; remarkable man, that."

Maurice stopped. "Father Prague?" he questioned. "You don't mean to tell me that that was Father Prague?"

"What, didn't you know?" laughed the bigwig. "Well, that's curious."

"I hadn't the least idea who he was."

"He'd be sure not to tell you," said the other. "The most modest, simple fellow living. But he's corrupting the

place. An out-and-out Romanizer. Confessional, mass-books for children, statue of the Virgin Mary, incense—the whole thing.”

When Maurice came to his parents, he said to his father:

“Why didn’t you tell me the priest was Father Prague? Don’t you know he’s one of the greatest men living, close personal friend of the Prime Minister——”

“I know he’s a rascal, a thorough rascal!” interrupted old Mr. Sangster. “They call him the ‘Kidnapper,’ and he deserves it. Don’t tell your mother you’ve been speaking to him. She’d never enjoy a good night’s rest again. *She* thinks,” he whispered very awfully, his whiskers brushing Maurice’s cheek, “that he is the Devil himself!”

What was Phœbe doing all this time? She was standing behind her mother-in-law in the darkened hall, listening very politely to the old lady’s remarks, trying very hard to keep a look of interest in her eyes, struggling inwardly to suppress yawn after yawn. Poor little provincial, suburban Phœbe! Oh, how tired she was! Tired of political meetings, tired of railway traveling, tired of hotels. And how she longed to be at home with her babies! Nothing in the whole world compared with those delightful little beings; to busy herself about them, to play with them, to go shopping for them, to discuss with the nurse this and that concerning them, and to watch the increasing dawn of their intelligences—teaching them the names of things, encouraging them to be curious, interested, and discriminating; to hear their little voices calling for her from the nursery landing, to hear them shaking the gate at the stair-head as she came to them; to feel their little cheeks pressed against her face when they greeted her, to sit with them by the nursery fire telling stories at night, to wake in the morning with the thought that they were coming down the corridor to play in her bed with her—these things, these delicious thoughts of her maternity, you may be very sure,

were wonderfully closer to the heart of Phoebe than the great speeches of her husband, the incessant toil of packing and unpacking their boxes, and all the seething restlessness of a life that was hubbub, movement, and excitement that led nowhere.

They took the old people back to the little shop, and then drove away to the hotel. In the carriage Phoebe said to her husband:

"I hope there will be a letter for us when we get back."

"A letter!" he exclaimed, coming out of his abstraction.

"What do you mean, dear? A letter from whom?"

"From nurse."

"Oh, to be sure!"

"I'm rather anxious now that the weather is so much colder."

"They'll be all right. Won't it be jolly to see them again?"

"I was going to ask you, When do you think we shall be going back?"

He considered for a long time.

"I should say—but it's difficult to be certain—in about two weeks' time. I'm in Girshel's hands. He's arranging three or four extra meetings as we go along!"

"Your mother doesn't like him."

"He's a clever little creature, all the same."

When they got back to the hotel they found a letter from the nurse, and Phoebe sat down very happily in the lounge, taking off her gloves and putting back her veil, to read the news to her husband while he drank a large tumbler of egg-and-milk.

She had got but half-way through the letter when Girshel came in, grinning, energetic, very much awake, and ready to sit up to any hour in the morning. He was stamping his feet, and rubbing his hands together, for it was bitterly cold. He called a waiter and ordered a brandy-and-soda

and sandwiches. Then he sat down next to Maurice, put his hand on the orator's arm, and said to him:

"The worst speech you ever made in your life!"

Maurice, with the tumbler of egg-and-milk in his hand, turned away from Phœbe, looked at Girshel, and asked what he meant by that. Perhaps he was more interested in Girshel's remark than in the nurse's letter.

"There was no mutiny in it, no rebellion, no fight," answered the Jew. "It was the speech of a young curate dreaming of—what do they call it?—why, the Second Coming. Man alive, you don't suppose democracy wants stuff like that? You don't suppose revolution is going to come from tracts and sermons? What was the matter with you?"

Phœbe got up from her chair, folding the letter, and said that she would go to her room.

"All right, dear," said Maurice, not getting up; "I shan't be long."

Girshel raised his head, looked at her with a grin, and, still sitting, but just touching the brim of his cap for politeness' sake, said to her:

"I'll do the curtain lecture to-night, Mrs. Sangster. You can go to sleep with an easy conscience. I'll give the rascal what for! Good-night to you. Pleasant dreams. Heard from the kiddies? Ah, I thought so. How are they? That's all right, then. Good-night." And before she had quite turned away, he was leaning forward to Maurice.

"I've arranged for you to address the Liberal Working Men's Club to-morrow night," he said. "Eight o'clock sharp. We can catch the ten-thirty p.m. for Nottingham afterwards; plenty of time. You've got to undo the bad effect of to-night. Derby wants a flarer. You can't go away leaving the impression that Radicalism is milk and water, specially suitable for Sunday-school teachers, the

Band of Hope, and the Young Men's Christian Association."

Maurice said:

"I've struck a better line than ever before. It comes new to you, and you don't see where it will lead. But it's a straight line, and it will take us where we want to be."

"Humbug!" said Girshel. "Humbug!" he repeated. "That won't wash at all."

And he held forth for a considerable time on the right line for Maurice to follow, concluding by clicking his fingers and whistling for the waiter, a summons greatly resented by that dignified person, and causing considerable annoyance to the other people in the lounge.

"Brandy-and-soda," he said sharply, and drew out his cigar-case.

Maurice was tired, and he disliked the Jew's dictatorship.

"I think you had better make the speech to the working men yourself," he answered, stretching his legs. "I've finished, as far as Derby is concerned."

"Nonsense!" said Girshel, biting off the end of his cigar, and spitting it on to the carpet. He struck a match. Laughing in a gurgling way, and holding the match downwards, he demanded:

"Do you think I keep a dog to bark myself?"

Then he lighted the cigar.

"I don't understand that remark," said Maurice.

"Don't you, though?"

"If you think I'm your mouthpiece, without a soul of my own," said Maurice haughtily, "you're making a very great mistake."

"Not a doubt of it," grinned Girshel; "but I don't. I regard myself as Apollo, and you as the poet I've taken up as a hobby. I'm inspiring you. I give you inspiration. And I find the cash. That's our relation. Come, now, isn't it true? Where would you be if it wasn't for me? Who

planned the present campaign? Who financed it? Who's running it? Why, I'm giving you the chance of your lifetime!"

"I can't understand you," said Maurice, crossing his legs, and regarding the little man with interest. "What are you really aiming at? You don't believe in God; you laugh at morality; you make fun of religion, and yet you want to do things, want to alter life, and to improve the lot of the poor. Why?"

"Look here, Maurice, old boy, you don't believe in God either. You think you do, but you don't. I'll tell you what your religion is. You believe that something or other that somebody or other told you about a God when you were a boy may possibly be true, and because you're half afraid that this God in whom you half believe may punish you if you don't try to do what you imagine He wants you to do, you go to chapel, and you say your prayers, and you keep the five or six of the ten commandments that come easiest to you."

"The question is not my faith, but yours," said Maurice.

Girshel grinned from ear to ear. Nothing delighted him more than to be the center of interest.

"Why do I want to improve life?" he asked, taking his glass from the table, shaking up its contents with a jerk, and half raising it to his lips. "Because it's a big job, and my mind is an active one."

He drank noisily, set down the glass with a bang, and threw himself back in his chair.

"I'm a man of business, Maurice. I use my senses where they can be useful, and I don't use them where they can't amuse me. The poor people? Well, I'm sorry for them in a general way; but they don't keep me from my sleep. I'm not thin because I want to make them fat! No; none of that rot—like your speech to-night. I want to use democracy to execute my ideas. And I mean that

they shall. Pah! it's easy enough. It's like trade—all advertisement and illumination. Plenty of limelight, plenty of repetition, and the thing's done. Keep telling these fools that they aren't as rich as the rich, and they'll get angry, they'll begin to stir, and then they'll say, 'How's that, then?' And after that, why, it's as easy as falling off a log."

"I see," said Maurice; "you make a hobby of me because I'm useful to this other hobby of yours."

Girshel leaned forward, struck him on the arm, and, with his monkey face almost against Maurice's, said cheerfully:

"Look here, I'm a man who takes up politics as another man takes up coins, or postage stamps, or architecture. That's all there is in it. I'm interested; the thing amuses me; I want to see my own ideas at work. What posterity may say of me I don't care a brass farthing. Whether I'm buried in Westminster Abbey or in Wormwood Scrubbs doesn't matter to me a toss. I'm not out for glory. I'm not out for fame. And I know very well that when I die, it will be *snuff*—like a candle!"

He opened his huge mouth to its very widest, showing all his teeth, and laughed till he cried.

"That's what it means to me! See? I'm no humbug, and I'm no demagogue. I can't get drunk on brandy-and-soda, and certainly I can't get drunk on words. It takes a teetotaler to do that." He laughed again. "Put that in your pipe and smoke it!" he said, hitting Maurice in the chest; and then, throwing himself back in his chair, he laughed again.

"As for me," said Maurice, seriously and quietly, "the more I see of the people in their homes, and the more I make a study of their actual lives, the more determined I am to sacrifice my whole life for their welfare."

"And so you shall, dear boy, so you shall; only it shall

be in my way," rejoined Girshel. "Leave yourself in my hands. You do the talking, and I'll pull the strings. We're partners; and it pays you—pays you well. You know it does, you rogue, you!"

Before Maurice went up to bed it was agreed that he should speak to the working men on the following evening.

V

LORD RAVENSTRUTHER, chief Whip of the Liberal Party, quite agreed with the Prime Minister and one or two other Cabinet Ministers who had written to him on the subject, that this thing had got to be stopped. Further, he entertained in his mind not the smallest misgiving that he was the very man to stop it.

He sent Maurice a line, marked "Private and Confidential," asking him to call. This brief line of the Chief Whip was one of those ingenious missives which leave the recipients in a painful state of uncertainty as to whether the summons is friendly and flattering or hostile and cross. Maurice read the note half a dozen times. He concluded that he was in for a wiggling.

On paper Ravenstruther was an ideal and a romantic person. He was the son of the richest Marquis in Scotland, and his mother, a great favorite of the Queen, had been one of the three beautiful daughters of the famous Duchess of Wiltshire. He went to Eton and to Oxford. He passed from Sandhurst to the Life Guards. From the Life Guards he moved to the House of Commons. And he married Miss Goggenheimer.

Whether it was from the strain of observing an appearance of the blandest innocence during his adventurous boyhood, or the strain during his sojourn with the House-

hold Brigade of presenting a military appearance, or the strain when he entered the House of Commons of maintaining a political appearance, whether it was from one or all three of these considerable successive strains laid upon his mental organization, certain it is that Lord Ravenstruther at thirty-three presented no other appearance to mankind than that of a rather bucolic and slightly idiotic gentleman who, having seen life on a very large scale, will cheerfully be hanged if he knows what to make of it.

His thick red hair, thoroughly oiled, parted in the middle, and combed backwards, gave a pull to his forehead which seemed to jerk up his eyebrows and keep them perpetually out of their official resting-place; his round, staring eyes looked as if they were frightfully puzzled to know what was coming next; his solid mustache, curled upwards to his eyes, might have survived a soldier-like impressiveness if his chin had not glided away at quite so sharp an angle of mental deficiency; his nose had an inquiring turn which had never come to anything; his shoulders were just sufficient, but only just sufficient, to carry his coat; his chest was as flat as a postcard.

But he was tall, active, well-groomed, and had at least a dozen manners. His schoolfellows could never determine whether he was the most devil-may-care or the most pious of their contemporaries; his brother officers never knew whether he was a really very clever fellow or the most consummate ass that ever wore breast-plate and top-boots; and it was not until he had been in the House of Commons for three years that the Prime Minister could be persuaded, even by the most influential and charming people of the great world, to believe that Ravenstruther would make a Whip.

The Prime Minister was still doubtful on this point when he sent the note which caused Ravenstruther to drop his ambiguous line to Maurice. However, Ravenstruther had

excellent underlings; and he could be tactful on occasions, and he gave very impressive dinner-parties, and the smaller fry of the party rather liked to be seen talking to him; and, besides, in those days the Patronage Secretary was not called upon to display the various talents of a business man, a general, a financier, and a Jesuit. All that was required of him was charm.

Maurice was shown into the library of as fine a house as you will find in Belgravia, by a servant whose dark livery and silver buttons prepared the mind for rather more dignity in the master than most people found there. He entered this impressive room just as Lord Ravenstruther was dismissing a private secretary with a pile of documents, and was rising from a writing-table in the window, shaking out his trousers and pulling down his cuffs.

Ravenstruther, all in black with a large pink carnation in his buttonhole, and a very big pearl in his cravat, did not hasten to greet his visitor. He did not even look at him. He came forward, kicking out his legs to get the troublesome trousers down into straight lines (they had been pulled half-way up his thin shanks as he sat writing), and calling out a final instruction to the secretary at the door. But he did a very flattering thing. He retained Maurice's hand in his grasp, placed the fingers of his other hand on Maurice's shoulder, and kept him in this silent greeting, as though he feared to lose him and was longing to speak to him, while he continued his instruction to the secretary.

Then he looked at Maurice, smiled in the most friendly manner, and with an elaborate courtesy presented him to the largest arm-chair in the room.

"My dear Sangster," he began, confidentially and half-chaffingly, the tone so different from that to which the gentlemanly young secretary had been treated, "what

have you been up to in the North and the Midlands?" He opened an exceedingly handsome gold box, and offered cigarettes to his guest. "I hear you've been setting the whole party by the ears—what?" He stood before the fireplace, wide-legged, his coat-tails under his arm. "Fellows keep writing to me, saying that I must run a candidate against you at Bursby. Absurd! I tell 'em, we don't want to let the other chaps in with a three-cornered contest. Nonsense!" He struck a match. "Sure you won't smoke? Pestering me they are," he continued, frowning as he lighted the cigarette, "like the very devil—what? But to tell you the honest truth,"—as he turned to throw the match in the fire—"I've been so infernally busy these last two months that I haven't had time to look at the papers. I really don't know what you've been saying. That's why I wrote to you, my dear fellow—what? I thought you wouldn't mind telling me. Have you been very indiscreet? Have you been playing Old Harry—what?" He was swinging slowly and elegantly from side to side, letting first his left knee and then his right shoot forward and outwards, his feet far apart, his hands in his pockets, his coat-tails through his arms, his eyebrows raised their highest, and his red face wreathed in smoke.

Maurice, with all his honesty, could not prevent himself from feeling both flattered by the confidential friendliness of his noble host, and also guilty of an ungenerous and disloyal fault.

He said: "You remember I moved the adjournment of the House?"

"Ah, yes! But, my dear fellow, that was in a moment of pique." Ravenstruther straightened himself, walked unnecessarily to an ash-tray, where he flicked at his cigarette, and then returning to the hearth, he continued: "And in very irritating circumstances, too—very! I said so at the time. We all came to feel it. The Prime Minister, you

know, Sangster"—this very, very, very confidentially—"is a particular admirer of yours—what? He thinks a good deal of you. I mean, I'm not committing an indiscretion—what?—when I tell you that he's watching your career with interest. It's not the Cabinet, it's the rank and file, the silly old josser who can't sleep for fear of losing his seat, that's giving us all the trouble—rot! The Cabinet feels, and I feel, too, exactly as you do. We not only see that something has got to be done, but we want to do it."

Maurice interrupted: "Well, all I have been saying in the country is simply that. I've been saying that something has got to be done."

Ravenstruther threw his cigarette behind him into the fire, and having now thoroughly toasted himself behind, turned round, put his hands on the mantelpiece, and proceeded to warm the front part of him.

"But don't you see, Sangster," he said, one gaitered and varnished boot on the marble curb, and his head turned over his tall collar to regard his guest, "that it isn't the purport, but the tone, of what a man says that really matters in cases of this kind? I mean to say, the Prime Minister would welcome—positively welcome—any campaign for social reform—reasonable social reform. He's as keen as I am—as keen as you are—about the matter; but what we all feel is this, my dear fellow—what?—that you're putting off social reform—putting back the clock, as somebody said to me only the other day—by splitting the party and letting in the Tories. Campaign by all means—nothing better, it's exactly what we want—so long as you don't attack the Government—what?—so long as you don't split the party. But for Heaven's sake, let's all stick together; let's be loyal to each other—what? Let's work like one side!"

Maurice said that what he had seen in the course of his campaign convinced him that if the Government would desist from foreign adventures and tinkering the Constitu-

tion, and if it would seriously address itself to the removal of great social abuses which touched the homes and lives of poor people, the Party would simply sweep the country.

Ravenstruther became glowingly enthusiastic. He said nothing would suit his book better. He spoke rather anxiously and seriously of the difficulty of persuading certain rich and powerful men in the Party, but admitted that they would either have to yield or go; certainly, the future of Liberalism was social reform. And then he suggested that Maurice should write him a letter stating the first two or three, or perhaps better still, the first one or two great social reforms he desired to see brought about—a letter that Ravenstruther could show to the Prime Minister, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Foreign Secretary. Finally he wondered whether it would not be a good thing—however, this he left entirely to Maurice's own judgment—if Maurice wrote a letter to the *London Herald* expressing his conviction that the Government were in earnest, and would certainly tackle social reform in the new session.

“A letter like that,” he concluded, “would please the Prime Minister, and allay suspicions. You could do it awfully well. And it would more or less tie the hands of the old jossers. Besides, I want—I particularly want—to bring you and the Prime Minister together.”

He paused, as if he had something of extreme gravity to impart, and then said: “I don't want to see you going over to the Tories, Sangster; I want to see you, at the next shuffling of offices, in the Government. There, my dear fellow, I've shown my hand. But I know I can trust you not to give me away.”

Maurice declined an invitation to luncheon.

“You are married, aren't you?” asked Ravenstruther, as they shook hands.

“Oh, yes; I've got three children.”

“Lucky fellow!” This very sadly, with a pressure of

the hand. Then, in the most charming manner possible, as they went to the door together, "I wish you would bring Mrs. Sangster to dine with us one night—what? We should be delighted. My wife is anxious to meet you. Will you? Do, my dear fellow, do."

VI

THE bilious fog of the morning had changed color for the worse. It had become so entirely convinced during the day that the stucco fronts of Old Broad Street represented the true and only suitable tint for London's complexion, that by five o'clock in the evening, when old Mr. Champness left his office in company with Mr. Christopher Jiggins, it was a difficult business even for the match-sellers and newsboys in the gutter to decide where the atmosphere ended and the offices began.

Small impression was made on this black air by the yellow lights of the street-lamps which had been burning now for thirty-six hours at a stretch, and were likely to go on burning, as footpads, burglars, eloping couples, and the gas company devoutly hoped they might, another two or three days at least. A severe moralist with shares in the Gas Company, contemplating those street-lamps, and letting his eyes wander to certain lemon splashes surrounded by a brief aura of apprehensive whiteness in the upper regions, very like poached eggs of an inferior quality dreaming that they had been hatched with wings, might perhaps have been troubled in his conscience as to the dividends accruing from such a complete failure on the part of his company to illuminate the City of London inside and out, according to contract; he would have been less than human if he could have surveyed the melancholy scene without a warm and

very friendly feeling of gratitude towards the fog which ate up his gas as fast as it fizzed from the burners and kept all the brass needles on his thousands of meters tucked away under basement stairs, coal cellars and broom cupboards throughout the metropolitan area in a continued state of very profitable agitation.

Whether it was the amount of gas it consumed in this way, or whether it obtained its particularly suffocating flavor from the tons of smoke it was so industriously swallowing from the invisible chimneys overhead, certain it is that the fog that night had an effect upon the throats of sensitive people which was remarkably like strangulation. With the rumble of wheels, and the scraping of feet upon the pavements, there sounded from one end of London to the other the barking, coughing, choking, snorting, sneezing, and roaring of ladies and gentlemen at the point of suffocation. If it had been so dark that a man could not see his way, he might have guided himself from collision with a fellow-creature simply by listening for these laryngeal fog-signals. As old Champness said to Jiggins, a man could hardly hear himself speak for the coughing of these troublesome fools. But no sooner had old Champness opened his firm mouth to make this remark, than in oozed the fog, tickling his palate, coating his uvula, smothering his tonsils, filling his weasand, and loading his lungs, till he, too, started to bark like a dog, and was brought to a stand with one hand at his painful back, another at his bursting head, feeling that he must either suffocate or explode.

Jiggins patted the old gentleman's round back in the most anxious and affectionate manner conceivable, but he took very good care to make the remark which he considered suitable to the occasion through closed lips. "Mustn't speak, sir," he mumbled. "Most unwise; keep mouth shut; breathe through nose; better get cab soon possible; fog worse every——" A communication which

old Champness mistook for a milder form of choking on the part of his faithful and devoted secretary, contracted, very probably, by attendance upon himself. There they stood, in front of the Royal Exchange, Jiggins mumbling through closed lips, and old Champness coughing till he was blue in the face, stamping his right foot, reaching round one of his arms to tap himself on the bottom of the spine, and making the most alarming noises out of a menagerie as he struggled to fetch his breath, with the tears raining down his cheeks, his bloodshot eyes staring as if they were looking for a soft spot to jump out upon before he burst, and with his mouth wide open in the fog. At the end of this terrible strain, and still half-choking, old Champness shook his head with tremendous solemnity, pointed doggedly forward with a bent arm, and started to advance. Jiggins at his side nudged him, put his mouth to the old gentleman's ear, and mumbled: "Cab; insist!" But Champness shook his head obstinately. He intended to walk.

Now Jiggins had been extremely and even painstakingly sympathetic with Mr. Champness ever since the dispersal of the family; he had walked to and fro with the old gentleman; had approved every sentiment he uttered—even when those sentiments expressed unbounded contempt for the Church and the Party to which in secret Mr. Jiggins attached his soul and his opinions; and had shown to the sturdy and obstinate old man, by many delicate little touches, how very keenly, even filially, he felt for him in his solitude and disappointments. But this London Particular was really too much for Jiggins. He said to his wife afterwards, helping himself to a stiff glass of whisky: "I saw myself, by gosh! walking through the fog to the train at St. George's Church with that dear old blighter! Not this nigger! Not at no price." And he explained how he had done it.

"I let him go as far as Gracechurch Street, cursing inwardly all the time; and then, nipping hold of his arm as I caught sight of an empty growler at the curb, I fairly shouted into his ear: 'I insist upon your driving home, sir. Think of Miss Champness's anxiety. Think of your valuable health.' And with that I bundled him in, shouted 'Clapham!' and was on the opposite seat with the door banged fast, before he had done choking. But the old boy was growling all the way, furious, and insisted upon stopping at the Swan, and walking the rest of the distance. Did you ever know such a pig-headed old chap? Ah, but I'm sorry for him, hang me if I'm not! There's fine stuff in the old boy. He's a real Englishman. He's given me quite a new idea about Dissenters. If they were all like him, 'pon me soul, I wouldn't mind being one myself. But how he can mix with those Stigginses, and Pecksniffs, and Chadbands who come cringing and psalm-singing round to the office for subscriptions, dashed if I know!"

When the subject of this narration got into his house, and found it warm, well-lighted, and as cheerful as Aunt Mildred could make it, he said to himself: "He's a very good fellow, is Jiggins. I rather like him for that piece of impudence—pushing me into the cab. It shows anxiety for me. It shows thoughtfulness. And he's a fellow, too, who himself much prefers to walk. A nice, gentlemanly, pleasant, kind-hearted, unselfish fellow. Very."

Aunt Mildred came to the door of the drawing-room.

"Well, Humphry!" she exclaimed, "how did you find your way home?"

"Why, well enough. No difficulty at all," he replied, shaking himself out of his overcoat. He sat down on the hall-chair, and the maid, who had hurried up from below at the sound of the closing door, knelt down, unfastened his black gaiters, and unlaced his shoes.

"This is Leonard's night, isn't it?" he asked, looking down at the maid.

"Yes, Humphry."

"Perhaps he won't come. The fog's just about black enough to stop him, I should say. Anybody else coming?"

"Phœbe hopes to come."

"Oh, she won't come for certain."

"I was afraid the fog might——"

"I suggested to Jiggins that if he could see his way across the road he might drop in. That will do," to the maid; "thankee!" And he got up, and stumped into the drawing-room in his slippers.

The maid disappeared with her master's dirty warm shoes held as far as possible from her apron, and Aunt Mildred followed her brother into the drawing-room, closing the door behind her.

He had gone straight to his chair, pushed it close to the hearth, esconced himself there, shoved his slippered feet into the fender, and was feeling in his waistcoat for his eyeglasses, the evening newspaper on his lap.

Aunt Mildred went to the sofa, took her needlework from the basket at her side, and began to sew.

"It's quite cold," she said.

"Well, sharpish," he replied, forcing the eyeglasses on to the end of his nose. He shook out the newspaper. "The fog's nothing like so bad here as t'other side of the river."

He had been reading for a quarter of an hour, when the door opened and Leonard entered the room.

Aunt Mildred's face lighted up in a moment. A careful observer might have seen that she really had to lay severe restraint upon herself to remain seated as he approached.

Old Humphry half turned his head over his shoulder, and demanded: "Who's this? Leonard!" Then, turning to his newspaper again: "So you braved the fog, did you?"

"I came early, before it got worse," replied Leonard, kissing the side of his father's head.

"What about going back?" asked the old man, still reading.

"He could sleep here if necessary," said Aunt Mildred.

"Yes, I suppose he could. I see that Master Maurice has begun to climb down. Written a letter to the papers denying that he is a rebel. Says the Government means to undertake social reform directly constitutional business is out of the way. What a humbug the fellow is!" He shook the paper and turned over-leaf.

"Well, Leonard," Aunt Mildred asked, "how have you been getting on?"

He smiled at her through his spectacles. "I'm not quite sure whether I've been getting on at all," he replied.

"There's not much doing just now, I expect?"

"Oh, a good deal," he replied; "but too many people nibbling at it."

Without looking at his son, old Humphry suddenly asked him what he thought of Maurice Sangster.

Leonard turned his head slowly, pouted his lips, frowned at the fire very austere, and looked exceedingly like a perplexed owl.

"He gave you a start at the Parliamentary Bar, I know that," said old Humphry; "or at least, if he didn't, it was through some of his friends in the House of Commons. I don't expect you to say anything vindictive, but in your heart, what do you think of him as a politician?"

Leonard replied slowly and judicially: "I should say he was perfectly honest."

"Should you, though?"

"Whether his judgment is good is another matter."

"But you think him honest?"

"On the whole, yes."

"Well, I don't."

After an uncomfortable pause of a few minutes, Aunt Mildred said in her soft, gentle voice, smiling at Leonard: "One thing we can be quite sure of—he's devoted to Phœbe."

"She helps him," said old Humphry. "She's useful. Look how he drags her about the country with him. The rogue knows the value of a lady."

"I'm sure he's very proud of her," said Aunt Mildred, in her quiet, perfectly composed, and inoffensive way of insisting upon her opinions; "and I'm equally sure that he is very fond of her."

Old Humphry only said: "I suppose he has got what he wants out of the Government, some promise of a minor office to shut his mouth—and now he means to behave himself. But what will the paymaster say? There's a rogue for you! That Girshel fellow. Fancy any man of decency placing himself in the power of a rascal like that!"

Leonard said to his aunt: "I saw Phœbe yesterday."

"Did you? Tell me about her. I'm afraid the fog will prevent her from coming to-night. How is she? And the children? I sent little Humphry a box of bricks yesterday—very garish. Did she say if his cold was better?"

"I don't think she did."

"Then it is better!" She looked up with one of her bright smiles.

"They had been to luncheon with Lord Ravenstruther, and just came in to see me on their way home. Phœbe said she was quite overwhelmed."

"Such grandeur, I suppose?"

"Yes. Tremendous."

Old Humphry laughed in his throat. "That pleased our young Socialist, I'll warrant!"

He threw the paper down, put his hands together, and looked at the fire with a malicious grin in his eyes.

"Did Phœbe enjoy herself? Did she like those great people?" inquired Aunt Mildred.

"She said that Lady Ravenstruther evidently meant to be kind and tried to be kind, but the whole thing was so formal, and solemn, and unreal, that she was glad to escape."

Old Humphry grinned at the fire with great amusement, smacking the fingers of one hand on the back of the other, his elbows digging into the arms of the chair.

"I hope all the more that she will come to-night," said Aunt Mildred. "I should like to hear her own description. You are not particularly graphic, Leonard."

Old Humphry began to swing his head slowly up and down, smiling very grimly.

"Well, I wasn't there, to begin with," replied Leonard, "and Maurice had such a lot to say about——"

"Ah, I'll be bound he had!" cried old Humphry, with a great laugh; and he got up vigorously, shook himself, laughed again, and then stalked away to the door. "I can see him eating at lords' tables!" he said heartily. "And I can see him eating his own words there, without turning a hair—yes, without turning a hair!" He opened the door, passed out, and banged it after him.

Directly he was gone from the room, Aunt Mildred put away her needlework, slipped off the sofa on to her knees, laid her hands round Leonard, kissed him, and said: "Tell me, how is it going?"

You would have taken her for his mother, not for his aunt; and perhaps that was the real difference in her affection for her nephew and niece. She adored Leonard as a mother adores her son; she loved Phœbe as a nice aunt loves a nice niece.

She was one of those reddish, straw-colored women who take all the strength and health and joy that life in the open air of a country like England can give to humanity.

Her complexion made one feel well to look at it; her fat friendly eyes, that for all their smallness filled the sockets as a Brazil nut fills its shell, shone with an overflowing kindness; she had a cheerful short nose, a largish upper lip, but with none of her brother's severity; a comfortable chin, and the total expression of her pleasant face was one of ruddy and chubby and bountiful warm-heartedness.

"I don't think it is going at all well," answered Leonard, with a wry smile. "I find I shrink more and more from what is called declaring oneself. And she doesn't help me in the least. That's a bad sign, isn't it? I've always understood that when they approve they are more than ready to loose the stammering tongues, and to bow the awkward knees of their hesitant suitors. Moreover, her mother doesn't encourage me. That's a worse sign still."

"Why not write to her?"

"I thought about that, oddly enough, only last night."

"Well, you haven't abandoned hope, then?"

"Yes, over the letter."

"How was that?"

"When I came to think it over I felt a fool. To begin with, she is really exceedingly beautiful. Then she is surrounded by the most agreeable and amusing people you can imagine. And then—well, what have I got to offer her?"

"Now, Leonard"—very seriously and thoughtfully, stroking his arm, and looking up at him—"why don't you let me speak to your father? Why don't you? Or—why don't you speak yourself? I think it is time we got matters on to a really proper footing. I wasn't at all satisfied when I got your father to go to little Humphry's baptism, and to ask you to dine here once a week; that was only a beginning. It was better, but a start, nothing more. The present position is not at all a right one, and it has lasted

long enough. I am quite ready, if only you will give me your permission, to open negotiations."

"There's one thing I haven't told you yet," said Leonard.

"What is it?"

"Something quite fatal to your scheme, I'm afraid. She's a Roman Catholic."

"Oh, Leonard!"

"You can imagine the effect of that announcement on my father. But I think it is much wiser not to consider it at all. I've no reason to suppose—quite the contrary—that she regards me with the smallest interest. Therefore, why make matters here far worse by a disclosure that is so unnecessary?" He looked at his aunt, and said: "Can't you see him storming if we told him? and can't you hear him chuckling if she refused me after all? How the old angel would relish such a congenial anticlimax!" Leonard did not laugh as he made this final remark, but he lifted his eyebrows almost high, depressed the corners of his mouth, and over the top of his spectacles quite smiled at the fire.

"I'm sorry, really sorry, that she's a Catholic," said Aunt Mildred, a finger at her lip. "That, I'm afraid, *does* complicate matters worse than ever. You see your father has quite made up his mind that you will go over to Rome."

"I know he has."

"What a pity—what a pity it is!"

He put a hand upon her shoulder. "Don't worry, you very dear creature. The difficulty is not here, but there. I was a dreadful greenhorn ever to think that she cared tuppence about me. I must put that out of mind. And my heart isn't anywhere near broken."

"But you love her, Leonard?"

"Oh, I'm fond of her, yes; very fond of her, indeed," replied the lover.

At that moment the door opened, and the servant announced Mr. Jiggins.

VII

SHE really was, as Leonard saw, exceedingly beautiful. She was so extremely beautiful, in fact, that most young men sheered nervously away from her, seeking solace on the lower plane of prettiness, where they could sparkle on the surface of small talk without the inconvenience of feeling that they were making fools of themselves. It was only a very sober, slow-moving, and deep-minded person, like Leonard Champness, who could find rest for his soul in the company of such a splendid creature as this particularly splendid creature, Ruth Kingsford.

Her father was said by good judges to be the ablest, as he was probably the most auriferous, Queen's Counsel practicing at the Parliamentary Bar. Her mother was the only daughter of that gracious President of the Royal Academy who is remembered for his personal beauty and his admirable after-dinner speeches, while his pictures, hanging in the dining-rooms and drawing-rooms of provincial bourgeoisie, are now charitably forgotten by gentlemen traveling in the line of art criticism.

Sir Edward Kingsford, the father, was tall, solid, enduring, rather Norman than otherwise; Lady Kingsford, the mother, was tall too, but slight, graceful, willowy, and Grecian. Their five daughters and three sons composed a group of late Victorian humanity which could hardly be equaled from one end of England to the other for charm, freshness, and beauty. There was perceptible, on certain occasions, just a hint of suburbanism in this delightful family, but they were very well educated, very kind-hearted, and very happy people.

They lived in one of those cheerful and comfortable houses which appear at suitable distances from each other

on the wooded heights of Hampstead Heath; and they made of this house, with their laughter, their music, their games, and their affection, something infinitely more attractive than the hymn-writers have at present been able to discover in that Paradise which most of them appear to think, on evidence which would certainly fail to convince a common jury, ought to disgust us with terrestrial existence.

The gardens of this house were described by the more effusive of Lady Kingsford's feminine acquaintances—she was kind to everybody—as “a perfect dream,” a phrase which produced a state of excessive irritation in the minds of the gardeners, especially on a very hot and back-aching day devoted to planting out. But they really were genuine English gardens, as full of repose as of beauty, as consolatory with restfulness as they were bewitching with loveliness.

Birds sang in this enchanting sanctuary on a fine spring morning as if no Easter Monday were in the calendar, and no cocoanut-shies, Aunt Sallies, merry-go-rounds, and swing-boats were coming to Hampstead Heath from the distant fog of East London. The kitchen garden was as full of flowers as the borders running round the lawns, and in the kitchen garden one could stand for a full hour on a lazy afternoon eating raspberries and gooseberries without making any noticeable difference in the loads of the bushes. Under the shade of venerable oak trees, out of sight of habitation, you could lie in a hammock or sit in a low chair, listening to the distant sounds of croquet and tennis beyond yew hedges, reading a book or watching butterflies and bumble bees in the flowers, till a neat maid-servant came to inquire whether she should bring you your tea or would you prefer to join the others.

And, of course, whatever your age or your sex, you very much preferred to join the others.

Two of Ruth's younger sisters were already engaged,

and the question was an urgent one in the family whether they should have a double wedding next year, or divide the two jollifications by three or four months. Ruth herself had received proposals, chiefly from middle-aged gentlemen of a pensive and diffident turn of mind; but, whether she had received proposals or not, there would never have been the least shadow of envy or jealousy in the felicitations she showered upon these younger sisters. For Ruth loved her father more than anybody in the world, she loved her home more than any other home she had ever seen; and no novelist that ever wrote could persuade her—no gentleman who humbly and nervously ventured to apprise her of the state of his affections towards her, could persuade this singularly clear-headed young woman that marriage was the most blissful form of existence offered to the feminine sex. Where might she look for a better man than her father? Where would she find a happier home than the dear cheerful house on Hampstead Heath? A baby, yes; she had no doubt whatever on that score—a baby, obviously, would be a most delectable possession; but a husband! Well, a husband, Ruth Kingsford was disposed to think, would take all the guilt off the infant gingerbread.

Somebody said of her: "If Du Maurier had ever ventured to draw a Madonna, and Rossetti had ever attempted to draw a daughter of Belgravia, the two pictures balanced one against the other might have given us a fairly true picture of Miss Kingsford." She had the atmosphere of sanctity which goes with great beauty, the intensity of expression which only springs from the deepest affection, and the refinement and distinguished qualities of the carefully reared. She was dignified and austere, without being chill. She was splendid and handsome, without heaviness of any kind. She held herself regally, but only because she was strong, well-formed, and conscious of self-reverence. She looked people unflinchingly in the eyes, but only because

she could conceive of no other reasonable way of regarding her fellow-creatures.

She respected most of the things that gave her pleasure, rather than stooped to them. She admired big animals, and overlooked most of the little ones, particularly lap-dogs. She rode a tall well-boned, heavy-shouldered horse, to which she was devoted, but which she never spoilt with sugar or irritated by caresses. Her favorite dog was a mastiff belonging to her father, which she took care to see the stablemen did not spoil by overfeeding. She preferred the older kinds of big roses, which breathed the authentic fragrance of their ancient ancestry, to the newer and scentless varieties which suffered from the prevalent weakness for what dreadful people call "art shades."

While her sisters could sing very well, or play the piano and violin quite creditably, and while her brothers were rather distinguished, in their characters of young officers, for these same accomplishments, Ruth never performed at all. In the drawing-room she helped her mother at the tea-table, and saw that other people were comfortable. In the gardens she was the unquestionable mistress of the gardeners, as in the stables no groom dared to go against her orders. She was rather slow at tennis, but at croquet and archery she was easily head of the family. But her real power lay far away from anything in the nature of diversion.

She was one of those beautiful women who begin to use their intellect before they know they are beautiful, and so find themselves curious, attentive, unsatisfied, and athirst before the world has convinced them of their perfection. She had been interested in languages and science as a girl, and this interest was just growing into a divine curiosity when she did up her hair and came down to dinner in a low neck. She was her father's companion on his walks, and those walks encouraged her in the truth of

her growing conviction that the kingdom of a human creature is the mind. Kingsford was a faithful Catholic, but he did not close his eyes to the modifying influences on theology of modern science. He spoke of things frankly to Ruth, and though he was a better lawyer than philosopher, he was a sufficiently interesting and weighty person to influence her mind very thoroughly.

"One thing," he said to her, after a discussion about science and theology, "is perfectly and unshakably secure. Christ founded a Church. While we remain humbly and dutifully in that Church we need fear nothing, nor need we be troubled by the transitory changes of opinion. The Church will endure. She alone can feed our souls. And it is our souls, not our minds, that we commit to her."

When Leonard Champness was taken for the first time by one of his friends at the Parliamentary Bar to the Kingsfords' house, he was very much bewildered by the atmosphere of high-spirited brightness and Gilbert and Sullivan gaiety which seemed to rush upon him at the opening of the drawing-room door like a malicious and practical-joking dragon of some *ensorcelled* world. I fear he cut but a sorry figure in that fine cheerful room, with his staring eyes, his frowning brows, his pouting lips, and his obstinate tuft of hair at the back of his head. You can picture him standing where his friend had left him, horribly conscious of a most complete isolation, with his clumsy hands clasped together over the abdominal region, his knees crooking forward, his neck stooping, his shoulders bowed, the collar of his coat sticking out and showing the bone collar-stud at the back, the tails of his coat hanging clear of his legs. And you will also guess that while he colored up and looked stupid, and dense, and boorish; and while the jolly young men in the room were wondering where in the deuce he came from; and the pretty young women, all vivacity and high spirits, were flashing from a distance their bright

eyes at him full of amusement—I say you will also guess, while he stood there thus awkwardly, confusedly aware of the idea that perhaps it had been a better thing if he had never been born, that Ruth Kingsford came forward to him out of the fiery mist, touched him with the magic of simple kindness, rescued him from miserable isolation, and carried him off to a quiet seat in the most secluded corner of the room.

Their friendship began from that moment; throughout the whole afternoon of this first encounter he clung to her with a pathetic wistfulness. When she went round the room with milk and cream, he followed at her heels with sugar. When she carried dishes of cakes, he was close at her elbow with plates of bread and butter. And when she was seated once again, he persisted in waiting upon her and her alone, like a royal footman.

It was not very long before she discovered that he was a man of much reading, and this enabled her to talk to him in a way which eased his bothersome sense of awkwardness. He did not talk at all well, and he was inclined, perhaps, to treat her as most bookish men treated women in those days; but gradually he discovered—at their third encounter, I think—that she was really interested in intellectual things, and from that moment he pursued her.

But one day she spoke to him of a book written by a very great friend of hers—a priest in the English Church—and he discovered that she was a seeker in the fields of theology and philosophy, like himself. Also, he discovered that while less profoundly acquainted with the writings of the greatest theologians and philosophers than the best men of his acquaintance, she was infinitely better versed than anybody he had ever met in the literature of mysticism. She shared his enthusiasm for William Blake, but she knew how the saints had disciplined the rhapsodies of imagination into the fruitful habit of meditation. He found himself

learning from her; and learning about mysticism, he came to learn about love.

"You have taught me," he said to her one day in the garden—they were eating golden gooseberries together—"a thing that I had never contemplated before in my life."

"That gooseberries are better off a bush than in a dish?" she inquired.

"No, I discovered that before I went into trousers."

"What a sharp boy! Tell me?"

"That serenity is the chief quality of the religious life. You look as if you had never fought with beasts at Ephesus, and you give me the notion that somehow or other it ought never to be necessary to be pugilistic. I never thought until I met you that worry is as sinful as intoxication, and that struggling to be good may quite possibly be the most prolific way of being bad. I read Carlyle as a boy, and I was born a Dissenter. Perhaps you cannot imagine what that means to a mind when it is growing up."

"Why are people so afraid of being happy?" she demanded. "Father Prague tells me that all the most earnest people he comes across are dismal people, and that all the most charming and gracious people he meets are not given to good works. Why is that?"

"But does he never come across," asked Leonard lugubriously, "those very shocking bigots who are frightfully in earnest but *affect* jollity, and put on urbanity like a swagger? I have!" he exclaimed, looking at her very comically over the rims of his spectacles.

"No; I don't meet those people," she said with a smile.

"They are jolly to catch you, polite to win your esteem, and then suddenly, before you know where you are, they are speaking of the Book, and you're done for. Oh, such dreadful people!"

She moved up the line.

"Come over here!" she called. "I've found the pick of the garden."

When he came to her, she said: "Regard this bush attentively. It is a very small and a very scrubby little bush. It has got hardly a leaf anywhere, and it is unnecessarily thorny. But it is gooseberries all over, and gooseberries of the finest flavor. What should the symbolist learn from this gooseberry bush?"

"First," answered Leonard, stooping well down to it, "to be grateful, for they are really very sweet gooseberries indeed; and with nice thin skins and no horrid hairs; and second, that the gooseberry bush which fulfills its natural function, however small, leafless, and misshapen, is a truer gooseberry bush than one which is all beautiful green leaves of a bush-like symmetry."

"What a lot they teach men at Oxford!" she said, glancing at him from her side of the bush. Then—"Somebody attacked me the other day," she told him. "It was in the train. At first I thought her a very charming old lady; we got into conversation, and it was interesting. But presently she said something extremely unkind about Catholics, and as gently as possible I told her that she was talking to a Catholic. It was then that she attacked me. The change in the expression of her face was remarkable. She became hard, rabid, and censorious. I thought afterwards that if we had parted without this cause of our dispute having arisen, she would probably have remembered me as a companionable and pleasant person; but because she discovered that I worshiped God in a form different from her own, she will never think of me again except with anxiety and judgment."

"And how do you think of her?"

"As one who has lost her way in life."

She rose from her stooping position, pulled the wide brim of her hat straight, and told him that he had eaten quite as

many gooseberries as were good for him. "I notice," she said, "that your conversation falls off as the quality of the gooseberries improves. A bush like this makes you a very Tacitus. Come along, we will go and see how the others are enjoying themselves."

"Did you argue with that old lady?" he asked, following meekly to the path, but with five very fine gooseberries in the palm of his hand.

"I don't think so. Well, I defended my Church once. She asked me to compare the condition of Catholic countries with the condition of Protestant countries. I think I told her that I preferred Catholic countries. I did certainly ask her whether she thought the great commercial nations could be truthfully described as happy nations."

"We lack something," he said. "The Catholic countries would be better for some of our energy; but we should be better for some of their reverence. I am not sure that commercialism is a road to heaven." He opened his palm and offered the gooseberries.

"But you mustn't worry about the matter," she said, refusing his offer.

"Don't you ever worry at all?" he demanded rather sadly.

She shook her head. "Why should I?" she asked. Then very quietly: "Can there be such a thing as troubled faith?"

He said to her after a pause, just as they were coming to the lawn: "My brother-in-law is your antipodes. He worries about poverty, suffering, and injustice. He is always thinking what he can do to change the world."

She stopped. "Is your brother-in-law sincere?" she asked. "Forgive me, but so many politicians are not, some consciously, and some unconsciously."

"I know. I think my brother-in-law is sincere. He thinks he is sincere. I'm sure of that."

"I can understand an atheist fighting to change the

world, and fretting himself to death at the hopeless task; but I can't understand how a man who believes, really believes, ever gets himself into that frame of mind. Protestants—you won't mind my saying so—are such worrying people!”

Her serenity filled him with admiration, but a doubt lay behind his instinctive reverence for the quiet of her soul. “I envy you,” he said slowly, “your tranquillity; and I almost think that to be perfectly undisturbed, perfectly undistracted, by the wretchedness of life, is one of the great summits of spiritual attainment; all the same, I think it is rather a fine thing to be a fighter, and all the same, I can't shut my eyes to the fact that if everybody did nothing, life would be more confounded than it is now.”

He looked at her questioningly, unhappy that he had not stated his case better, afraid that she would annihilate him.

“That was one thing I said to the old lady in the train,” she replied, with a quiet smile. “I was asked to compare all the great and numerous agencies for good which exist in Protestant countries, particularly in England, with the Evangelical inactivity of Catholic countries. She told me the exact number of pounds, many millions, which are spent every year in England by charitable societies. I told her that I very greatly admired the self-sacrifice represented by this immense sum of money; but I had to say that if I was a Protestant I should certainly be inclined to question why the result was so small. I don't know very much about the conditions of manufacturing cities, but, of course, I know your brother-in-law's articles, and I quoted them fairly effectually. I asked her to compare the lives of poor people in the great industrial centers of England with the lives of the peasants in Ireland, in France, and in Italy. I told her that an English mob filled me with horror. I invited her to visit Hampstead Heath on the next Bank Holiday. I suggested that she should go to such a town as Bursby,

and make inquiries among the people as to their religious views."

She ceased, and then, looking at him with a greater interest, she said: "I should like to meet your brother-in-law."

"May I bring him?"

"Will he be so good as to come?"

"I'm sure he would."

"My friend, Father Prague, is coming to stay with us in a fortnight's time. I should like your brother-in-law to meet him, and I want you to meet him too. He's the finest Anglican I know."

They were going forward across the lawn when she said to him: "True Dissenters and true Catholics are really of one mind on the only point that matters—they both believe that a man's life must be changed at its center before you can do any good with him. But a Catholic acts on this belief; the Protestant doesn't. That is why Catholic countries are so quiet, and Protestant countries so *progressive*!"

He swallowed the last gooseberry, wiped his mouth with his handkerchief, and said: "If Catholics and Protestants only talked about the things they believe in common, perhaps the other things which they don't agree about would diminish in number. But, of course, there will never be *one* Church."

"But there *is*!" she answered.

"Yours?" he asked.

"No. Yours and mine. Everybody's, who knows that life itself is more than Church, State, or Knowledge."

VIII

MAURICE and Phœbe got out of the train at Petworth. A very admirable, cockaded, long-coated footman hurried forward, touching his hat, to relieve Phœbe of her bag.

When they were in the fine carriage, and the two tall horses, having got over their first perturbation at having to pull such an out-and-out Radical, were trotting quietly and majestically along the country road, Phœbe said to Maurice: "I wish you could have left me at home! I feel very uncomfortable."

"Nonsense!" he said; "why should you?"

"I prefer my own way of living," she replied. "These great people only distress me."

"My dear Phœbe," he answered, "it is for you to improve them—their women, I mean." He cleared his throat, settled himself more easily in the carriage, and said: "I have not accepted this invitation to enjoy myself, or to play the sycophant; I have accepted it because I am determined to conquer the Liberal Party for Radicalism. I bring you with me, that you may act upon the women, as I shall act upon the men. I want you to stick to your guns. I want you to tell them what you know of the sufferings of the poor. You have heard all my speeches. You know how clamorous the country is for social reform. Let the women you meet know that." Then, as an afterthought: "You have less reason than I have to be distressed or uncomfortable by the ways of these rich people. You are a lady, and you have been educated as a lady. I consider that you are quite as good as any of them."

When they arrived at the house, they were conducted by a footman through the beautiful hall to the garden, where a number of very elegant people, waited upon by footmen and the butler, were taking tea under the shade of some trees. Lord Ravenstruther set down his cup on the grass, wiped his fingers on his handkerchief, and came forward to greet his visitors, shaking out his trousers. He was most friendly and kind, and Lady Ravenstruther (*née* Goggenheimer), standing to greet them, was kind too, without the least vestige of an American accent.

Among the guests were the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and a distinguished, very wealthy, extremely cultured Radical of the philosophical order who had the greatest admiration for Maurice as a demagogue. They were all kind and gracious in their welcome. Phoebe was made to sit down between Lady Ravenstruther and the Foreign Secretary. Maurice was provided with a chair between Mr. Martindale, the Chancellor, and the philosophical Radical. When they were quite settled, and tea had been brought to them, Ravenstruther let himself down on the grass, stretched out his long legs, pulled the brim of his Panama hat well over his eyes, and supported his curved trunk on his elbows.

Maurice had made a noticeable change in his appearance. The luxuriance of his locks had been curbed, his mustache was clipped back, his beard had been trimmed to little more than a tuft. No one now would have seen a likeness to Charles Dickens. He looked what he really was—an entirely earnest, pessimistic, and rhetorical Radical. One lock of dark hair fell across his white forehead. His tufted beard had a slight upward point. His eyes were full of challenge and fight. He wore a red tie.

Phoebe looked exactly like a lady in a rather small way of business, who had ordered a new dress from the best milliner on the occasion of a bazaar in aid of the chapel. It was of a terra-cotta complexion, this creation, stiffly boned, puffed at various points, and adorned wherever possible with those little gatherings of the material which are known as gaugings. She wore a minute brown bonnet on the top of her hair, and brown kid gloves which she did not remove for tea.

An observer of this group of people might have been led to believe that while the more aristocratic and godless section had taken no thought whatever as to what they should wear, the humbler and godly husband and wife had

spent a very considerable time on this exceedingly worldly occupation.

Nobody in that group could have spoken better on domestic politics than Maurice, but, unfortunately, domestic politics did not present themselves for conversation. And nobody there, I am inclined to think, could have discoursed with more point and effect on babies than Phoebe; but here, again, babies did not crop up. The men were speaking lazily of country subjects; the women were chatting about their friends, and music, and plays.

When Maurice went upstairs to dress for dinner, he was inclined to think that Phoebe had been right. These people were not his people. This world was not his world.

He said to her: "We'll stick to our guns, Phoebe. It's not very pleasant for us here, I admit. But it's only for a day or two. And then we'll go back to our home and to our life. I shall do my best to wake these men up to the true state of affairs; I shall strive with all my might after dinner to convert them; and whether I win or whether I fail, I shall go back on Monday to our own simple, natural, and homely life to work harder than ever for the poor."

Phoebe wore a high neck, and was so frightfully shocked by the dresses of the great ladies that her nervousness and diffidence were completely swallowed up in righteous indignation. She was very like a death's-head at the dinner-table. You really should have seen her upper lip.

It was late, nearly one o'clock, when Maurice came to her room. He found her sleeping and longed to wake her. His eyes were shining, his brain was on the rush with triumph and ambition. Instead of being on the outside of things, he had found himself in the very center. The men had gathered round him when the ladies went to bed, and although they smoked and drank whisky, they had listened with the very deepest sympathy to the narrative which they themselves had invited him to unfold. The Foreign

Secretary had been really interested, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had been distinctly encouraging. These two important Cabinet Ministers had shown him the very greatest consideration. There could be no doubt of that whatever. They had repeatedly exchanged glances when he spoke about the state of the North, and had said to each other again and again, "Most interesting," or, "I am sure he is right." And the philosophical Radical, a literary baronet of great wealth, had said to Maurice: "You are the best friend the Liberal Party has got, Sangster, the best and the truest friend."

He wanted to tell Phœbe all about this, but Phœbe was so very fast asleep that her mouth was open, her face was red, and she was snoring. He held the candle over her, and it made little points of light among the hair-curlers, which looked like the wires of an inferior tiara divested of its sham diamonds; but she did not stir. Her flannel night-gown was huddled with the bedclothes round her shoulders; the little round head with its screwed-up hair was all that could be seen of her.

Maurice said his prayers with very considerable difficulty. He even questioned whether a man could offer profitable prayers when his mind is tremendously engaged with a matter of very first-rate importance.

He got into bed, blew out the candle, and lay on his back, his hands behind his head, thinking.

All his thoughts came round to the door that was opening before him—the door of the Cabinet. But he did not feast his soul upon this thought selfishly. He was perfectly honest. He rejoiced in his victory because it was the victory of his religion and his politics. He would not enter the Cabinet as an obedient Whig, but as a conquering Radical. He would not rise to the headship of the nation to clothe himself in purple and fine linen, but to lift up the humble and meek.

You can guess how long it was before he fell asleep, and mingled his hard, stertorous breathing with the slow, regular, and contented snores of the placid Phœbe.

When he awoke he was aware of voices. He opened his eyes frowningly, closed them again because the room was streaming with light, and wondered who it was talking at his side.

He said, in a growling way, "Phœbe!" and she said to him: "They have sent us some tea, Maurice dear——"

"Tea!" he interrupted, "why, what's the time?" And turning over, rubbing his face in the pillow, and drawing a long breath, he was just about to drop off asleep again, when a voice dimly familiar, that became all at once a voice horribly, awfully, and shatteringly familiar, exclaimed in a nasal drawl:

"Ow, lor'! why, he's grown a beard!"

He jerked himself on to his elbow, rubbed his face with his hands, sat up, and looked with blinking eyes at Maud Gowler, who was standing beside his wife with the tea-tray.

"Where am I?" he demanded.

"He dunno where he are!" said Miss Gowler, who, in spite of a very smart, prim, and rigid appearance, was as much disposed as ever to be chatty and informing. "I believe he's forgotten he ever knew me," she said, depressing the corners of her lips. She raised her eyebrows and added: "It isn't so many years ago neither! not as years go now-days it isn't."

Maurice regarded her with a fixed scrutiny, and said: "What are you doing here?"

"What are *you* doing here?" she replied with great spirit, and very humorously for so dejected a person. "Ow my, haven't you got on, then? I never would have believed it myself. I always used to say that your line was preaching. So you do know me, then? I though you'd recognize me when you'd got the sleep out of your eyes."

"This is very interesting," he said, with a forlorn smile. "How are you, Miss Gowler? I'm very glad to see you. You've told Mrs. Sangster——"

"I haven't told her everything," said Maud very meaningfully. "I shouldn't like to do that! I've only announced the plyne fact that you used to live along with us in Lambeth, when we was both in humble circumstances."

Phœbe had taken the tray on to her lap, and was putting sugar into the cups. "Isn't it interesting, Maurice," she inquired gently—"meeting an old acquaintance so unexpectedly?"

"Ow, we was very much more than acquaintances, wasn't we, Mr. Sangster?" exclaimed Maud. "Quite chummy, we was. Why, he syved my life once. I shall never forget that!"

"I don't remember it," said Maurice, going colder and colder. He took the cup Phœbe handed to him, and began to drink hastily.

"Why, when I was going to commit susencide. Don't you remember?"

"Oh yes, to be sure. But I don't think that you could call that saving your life."

"I was, strite," she said to Phœbe. "Going to commit suicide! You wouldn't think it, would you? But I was—really I was. I was that miserable and lonesome. You know what I mean, don't you? Young girls are often took like that. Feel the whole world's against them; nobody loves them. What's the good of anythink?"

She went to the washstand. "I see you haven't used the hot water!" holding up a cosy in one hand and a brass can in the other.

"What do you mean?" asked Maurice, leaning forward to look past the curtains in that direction.

"Gentlepeople always have hot water at nights," replied Maud. "They wash themselves before they go to bed,

and rinse their mouths out, all of them. But I won't put it for you to-night if you don't want it."

She was going vigorously about the room now—she was a very excellent servant—picking up things and putting other things in their place. "I told the men-servants downstairs," she said, "that I should be nervous in here this morning, and so I am! It seems so funny to me to see you in bed with a lady I've never seen before. I can't hardly believe it. You a married man, and mixing with the aristocracy, and me waiting on you! Isn't that a chynge from the old dys?"

"How's your father?" he asked abruptly.

"Thanks, he's all right. Syme as ever he was. He doesn't seem to alter a little bit, he don't. I was wondering when you was going to ask after him! You and him was great friends, wasn't you? Ow lor'! you ought to have heard them arguing. My word!"

She went outside the door, and returned with a chair that had Maurice's clothes folded on the seat.

"Being treated like a lord, aren't you?" she smiled. Then with great kindness: "They told me downstairs—it was my evening out last night—that you put your boots outside the door before dinner. Didn't they laugh—just. You didn't ought to do that. We've got plenty of servants here to come in and fetch them away, and besides, it looks so bad to anyone coming down the corridor, seeing a pair of dirty old boots between the statues!"

After bustling about for several minutes she announced that she would come and fetch him for his bath in ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. "I don't suppose you've brought a dressing-gown with you," she said, "but I'll bring you one. I'll tell his lordship's vally. His lordship has got 'undreds of them. All the colors of the rainbow, they are. I think I'll have to select you a green one, Mr. Sangster!"

When she came to fetch him for his bath, knowing the men-servants and housemaids were observing her, Maud Gowler drew closely and familiarly to his side as they went down the corridor, saying: "You'll be sure and go and see my people when you get back to London, won't you? They'd love to see you again, I know they would." And at the bathroom door she said: "Mind you don't go into the wrong bedroom! We don't want no scandals here. Her ladyship's one of the particular ones, you know."

In spite of this humbling and unhappy episode, and although he was quite unable to rid himself during meals of the feeling that the men-servants were regarding him with horror and aversion as the perfidious lover of Maud Gowler, Maurice fought very ably for his hand with the statesmen and politicians of the party. Throughout the conferences of the day, however, the unexpected encounter with Maud Gowler sat like a lump of exceedingly heavy lead in the pit of his stomach. He saw a grandeur in the Foreign Secretary that he had not noticed on the previous evening, a sense of power in the Chancellor of the Exchequer that he had entirely overlooked during his triumph of that memorable evening. He was invidiously aware of a horrible reality in class distinctions. He felt that Maud Gowler, in some strange way, had smirched him with her own vulgarity. He was as guilty and ashamed as if he had put his arm around her waist and struggled to take liberties with her dejected lips. He felt common; he felt second-rate; he felt base.

Nevertheless, his genius for persuasion made a manful effort during that day, when the conferences were private, and the Cabinet Ministers were rather impressed than otherwise by his subdued manner, which they both took for a sense of modesty.

He felt, as Phœbe did, that the atmosphere of the house was ungodly. Most of the guests went to church, it is true,

and nothing in the simple service at that village church, except its dread formalism, distressed Maurice's conscience; but there was such evidence everywhere of superabundant wealth, such excessive luxury, such wanton splendor, that the young Radical, smarting from his encounter with Miss Gowler, and dreading that her version of the suicide episode might reach Lord Ravenstruther via the valet, felt it difficult at times to believe with his whole soul that these people really understood the spirit of Radicalism. He hated them the more for his own unmerited humiliation.

He was naturally distressed that a lady like Phoebe should have been exposed to the impertinent familiarity of a person like Maud Gowler, but he was also distinctly annoyed that the dresses of the great ladies should have offered a positive affront to the virtue and respectability of Mrs. Sangster. It eased the burden of his own personal humiliation to take umbrage against society on behalf of his wife.

He said to her on their way home: "We will live our own life, Phoebe. These people are passing away. Their reign is over. I feel that the statesman of Radicalism must keep himself quite clear of these rich aristocrats; he must not mix with them, nor share even temporarily their luxury. While there is so much penury and wretchedness in the world, luxury is a crime. I won't touch it. I belong to the people, and I will live with the people."

She put her hand through his arm, nestled close to him, and said: "Aren't you glad, Maurice dear, that you didn't, after all, marry Miss Gowler?"

They laughed together, and became happier as the train bore them farther and farther from Ravenstruther's fine house. He agreed that it would be a very jolly thing to see the children again. He was like a boy going home for his holidays.

"You will have a great deal to tell Aunt Mildred!" he said.

"Not when papa is within hearing!" she replied.

They laughed at that, but behind his happiness was the shadow of a great fear that he had failed to convince the Cabinet Ministers of his own fitness for Cabinet rank. He told himself rather bitterly that in all probability Maud Gowler had dished him.

IX

LEONARD CHAMPNESS was anxious that his vigorous and intrepid brother-in-law should not blunder into a false step or commit an indiscretion. At the same time, he feared himself to give offense by even a hint to one whose circumscribed origin might very well have made him over-sensitive in such matters.

"I think I told you," he said off-handedly, towards the end of their walk, "that the Kingsfords are Catholics."

"I forget whether you did or not," answered Maurice, "but it makes no difference. In the House of Commons we learn to be tolerant."

"They are Conservatives, too."

"I can't imagine rich people being anything else!" rejoined Maurice, smiling on the world about him.

Leonard was relieved to find his brother-in-law so genial and large-minded. He was rather puzzled, though, to account for his high spirits.

They were walking up the Heath together, and no doubt Leonard would have ascribed Maurice's happiness to the spectacle of love in painful embryo and love consummated by domesticity, which met their eyes at every turn, particularly on benches and in the romantic shade of trees and bushes, had he not detected the same spirit of happiness in his usually preoccupied and severe brother-in-law when he called for him at his house in Camden Town.

"I suppose," he said, "that in the House of Commons a man of intelligence very soon loses any narrowness of view which he——"

"Very soon," interrupted Maurice, with a short laugh; "and if he isn't careful, he may lose his soul as well. The House of Commons is the greatest assembly in the world; it is also the most perilous."

"I suppose so."

"But we're going to alter its character," continued Maurice. "When Constitutional questions are adjusted, and Social Reform becomes a reality, the composition of the House will be changed. The effect upon the character of the House will be enormous."

"One is watching the transition with great interest."

"My dear Leonard, it's a revolution!"

"Is it?"

"Absolutely a revolution. Wait; you will see! When democracy is in earnest, and the House of Commons is a faithful reflection of democracy, the step will be taken—the *enormous* step—which separates a debating society from a house of business."

"But it will demand a long time. Democracy is so stupid. Fifty years, I should say. Do you agree?"

"Wait a little," replied Maurice very significantly.

They turned in at the drive gate of the Kingsfords' house. Maurice was immediately struck by the dignity of the approach. He had accepted Leonard's invitation with the feeling that he was rather pleasantly stooping to oblige his brother-in-law by visiting these suburban friends. Phœbe, to tell truth, had persuaded him to go.

"What wealth there is in the country!" he exclaimed.

"Are you hungering to tax it?" inquired Leonard.

"Just look at this fine place, here in London, at the very edge of the most congested city in the world! Why, it's a park!"

The house disappointed him a little. "I expected a Buckingham Palace," he said, laughing. Then he added: "But it looks like a home. I rather like its comfortable appearance."

They were conducted to the drawing-room, and as the door opened Maurice was slightly perturbed, as Leonard had been, by the sounds of revelry which greeted him. He remembered that it was Sunday; he reminded himself that he was a Dissenter; he knew he was a Social Reformer.

Ruth looked up with interest as they entered. She was stooping to offer a dish of cakes to a dear old lady seated on a very low chair who was slightly deaf, and who wanted to know, before she took a cake, if Ruth had really been quite well lately. As it happened, Ruth was the first person seen by Maurice as he followed Leonard into the room.

She thought to herself: "He is a very striking-looking person. He has the hawk-like appearance of all great agitators—the passion to soar, the necessity to be cruel."

And Maurice said to himself: "That's as handsome a creature as ever I saw in my life."

He was flattered by the immediate interest his entrance aroused. People evidently knew he was coming. Conversation slowed down almost to silence. Everybody seemed to be looking at him, and pretending that they weren't.

He was used to the applause of multitudes, and to the overwhelming flattery of small circles; but here he tasted the pleasure of making a quiet and profound sensation on extremely polite and well-bred people who are not easily moved to curiosity or enthusiasm.

Sir Edward Kingsford greeted him as a guest of honor. "Very good of you to come and see us," he said.

Maurice glanced round the room. "What a very pleasant party!" he exclaimed. "You have discovered the secret of happiness—you give happiness to other people." He was looking about the room for Ruth.

"Young people make a house cheerful," answered Kingsford.

Leonard joined them. "I want to introduce you to Miss Kingsford," he said to Maurice, "and to her friend, Father Prague."

"Father Prague!" exclaimed Maurice, starting.

Kingsford said: "Come along; let me introduce you. Will you bring some tea, Champness?"

Kingsford had turned about, and as Maurice followed him he saw Father Prague sitting in a chair by the window, looking towards him. Almost at the same moment he noticed that the beautiful girl of his curiosity was standing by the open window talking to the Anglican priest.

The excessive labor of his campaign, his endless journalism, the burden of an ever-increasing correspondence, and the little daily and hourly worries which beset every man struggling to make a great career who has given domestic hostages to fortune—these things had set their marks on the face of Maurice. He was no longer smooth, eager, propitiatory. No one would have taken him now either for an elocutionist or a pastor. It was impossible to think of him asking anyone to join with him in prayer.

Ruth said to herself as she greeted him: "Yes, he is a hawk. That little face of his, with the white skin strained over the bone, those bright dark eyes, fierce with unrest, that disordered hair with the lock falling over the feverish forehead, that grim mouth under the mustache and beard, tell one exactly what the hawk tells one. He suffers and he inflicts suffering."

Maurice said to himself: "Here is a very beautiful young woman who has never known what it is to want."

When Leonard brought him tea, Maurice said to Ruth: "You have finished, and Father Prague has finished. I am sure you would much rather be in the garden. May I come with you and drink my tea there?"

"If you would like it," she answered, and led the way.

It flattered Maurice that the Anglican priest made room for him to pass out first, insisting upon this politeness, with an engaging smile and a friendly pressure behind his arm.

How beautiful the garden was! How pleasant to be standing on the smooth lawn drinking his tea and looking at Ruth Kingsford! He told himself that this was life as it should be for everyone. There was something of real homeliness and natural happiness here which the household of Lord Ravenstruther lacked. He was conscious of an exceeding tolerance, of a great content, and of a hope that one day he might himself possess such a home.

"You have not been campaigning since we last met?" inquired the priest.

"No; I am very glad to rest."

"One hears that the party is coming round to your view."

Maurice smiled towards Ruth. "But Miss Kingsford, I understand, does not share our enthusiasm."

She smiled. "I am interested."

"And she wants to alter things as much as we do," said Father Prague. "Only in her own way."

"I am sure," said Maurice, "she would not be content with things as they are."

"Why are things as they are?" she asked quietly, meeting his gaze.

"Because," he answered, "they are not quite bad enough to produce a revolution."

"But you mean," interrupted Father Prague, turning to Ruth, "what is the ultimate cause of human unhappiness?"

"Yes."

"So far as I can trace it," replied Maurice, beginning to set his teeth, "the origin of our mischief is the feudal system."

Father Prague smiled all over his face, laid a hand on Maurice's arm, and, looking down, said to him: "My dear sir, you speak as a politician to a lady who is addressing you as a theologian! Miss Kingsford wants to drive you back beyond the feudal system. She wants to land you under the tree of life which grew in the midst of the Garden of Eden. Come, you must be careful!"

The sensation that he had blundered awkwardly, the knowledge that Father Prague was putting him right with a disposition not to hurt his feelings, stung Maurice sharply. He answered quickly: "I am not a theologian. I am afraid I shall disappoint Miss Kingsford."

Ruth put out her hand for his cup. "Let me get you some more tea," she said.

"On no account," he answered, drawing back the cup.

Father Prague laid hold of the saucer from the other side. "You must let me do that," he said, with a laugh. "It is an opportunity to return a kindness, and it is an honor." When he had possessed himself of the cup he said: "Stay and talk with Miss Kingsford," and went off on his errand.

Maurice looked at Ruth. She had turned her gaze to the house, following Father Prague; but, knowing that Maurice looked at her, she brought her eyes round and met his glance. "I feel that you are going to teach me, Miss Kingsford," he said seriously, and with no smile.

"That is a very great compliment!"

"Will you tell me what you consider is the root cause of human unhappiness?"

"A will at cross-purposes with the universe," she replied.

"In my Church we preach about changing that will."

"And in mine, too."

"Indeed?"

"But you want to alter the conditions of life politically?"

"Nothing is nearer to my heart."

"I know."

He looked at her quickly.

"I can see it in your face," she said, meeting his eyes unflinchingly. "And your fierce speeches and your fierce articles have always struck me as sincere," she added. "That is why I was interested, why I wanted to meet you."

Father Prague arrived with the teacup, followed by Leonard with bread and butter and cake.

Leonard talked to Father Prague, and Maurice, turning to Ruth as quickly as possible, with his cup in his hand, at once resumed their conversation.

"I am sincere," he said, "because I love what I have set my hand to."

"That is what I want you to tell me about," she rejoined. "You have set your hand to pull down, and you love that. Presently you must set your hand to build afresh." She paused. "Will you love that, too?" she inquired.

He kept his eyes fixed upon hers, and did not answer.

"You will certainly pull things down," she said gently, smiling upon him out of the fullness of her serenity, "but will you build? I wonder about that. And I want you to build. I think it is the builder we need."

He said slowly: "You are reading my mind; and yet I feel you are so angry with the first page that you refuse to turn over."

"Angry?" she asked, very quietly.

"To have said 'interested' would have been presumptuous."

"But to have been presumptuous would have been to hit upon truth," she said, "and you are too busy a man, Mr. Sangster, to waste time on anything but the truth. Tell me. What is on the second page? I have read the first. I am so interested that I want to know what is overleaf."

He looked about him for a place where he might put down his teacup. She told him to leave it on the grass.

"You would like to walk," she said, "and so should I. Come along. I will show you our roses."

"You have placed me in the unfortunate situation," said Maurice—"unfortunate for you, uncomfortable for me—of having to play the proselytizer. I can feel the demagogue rising in my blood! In order to clear myself in your eyes, I must seek to convert you. Have I your permission to preach?"

"Most sermons," she answered, "are addressed to the converted."

"But you are Conservative; I am a Radical."

"It must be powerful preaching," she said, smiling, "to change a temperament." Then, looking at him: "But begin; I mustn't waste your time."

At that he plunged into his subject. He would pull down only what was cruel, tyrannous, shameful, what was abominably and atrociously inhuman. Until the superstructure was down, how could he build? He would build up from the foundations—the foundations of our common humanity—a new house of life for the habitation of men, a habitation strong as the rock, wide as the earth, high as the heavens, where men and women would be free, where labor would be without ugliness, where children would be happy. This was written on the second page of his mind. Would she believe that?

"And what is on the third page?" she inquired, turning to him.

"I do not expect to live to write it," he answered, thinking how very handsome she was.

"Do you ever think," she asked, clasping her hands behind her, and looking upward to the blue sky, "what a man of your temperament will do with himself when Millennium has come?"

"What does it matter?" he demanded, "what becomes of men like me when Millennium has come?"

"A fine answer," she said.

He stopped in his walk, venturing to detain her with a respectful touch upon her arm, and began to give vent to his dream of the New Jerusalem. "Do you realize," he demanded at the end of this moving harangue, "what makes the difference between a brilliant, a beautiful, and a spiritual creature like you, and the misshapen, hard-faced, *comical* harridan who glowers on the world from her doorway in the slums? From the moment you were born, Miss Kingsford, nothing was spared that could give you health and strength. As soon as you could observe, you found yourself surrounded by beautiful things; directly your mind was able to receive knowledge, everything was done to cultivate your intelligence. How much has it cost in pounds, shillings, and pence to make you what you are, and how much love and devotion were at the back of that financial expenditure? Now, look at the other side. Born in poverty, surrounded by ugliness, sent to the mill before intelligence is aware of itself, half-starved in body, entirely starved in mind and spirit, exposed to the hideous and iniquitous influences of the public streets—God in heaven! I wonder—yes, I wonder that the women of my class are as good and human as they are." He stopped dead, his face full of anger and bitterness. Then he asked her quietly, but with an undertone of acerbity: "Don't you want to share your advantages with those others?"

She replied, continuing their walk: "What happens to your theory when you meet a rich woman who is horrible and base, a poor woman who is everything one admires in humanity?"

"You cannot legislate by exceptions."

"For myself," she answered, "I do not like, I do not admire, the average woman I meet in London society half as much as I like and admire the peasant woman of Ireland."

He reflected on that. Then, striving to throw off the influence of her philosophy, he exclaimed: "Because some people overeat themselves, would you deny bread to the hungry?" And he was off again, bidding her face the gaunt fact that millions of people in England lived below the line of minimum nourishment.

"Now tell me," she asked, with real energy, "are you more anxious to feed those hungry ones, or to take away superfluity from the others?"

"I am as anxious to do the one as the other," he replied. "I don't hide from you," he added honestly, "that I am an iconoclast. I love to pull down; I love to punish. Iniquity makes my blood boil."

"I am quite certain," she said, very quietly and slowly, "that the country needs such a man as you, but I am equally certain that you are wrong."

"Tell me where I am wrong. I am willing to learn. I told you that I had the feeling you could teach me."

"Ah, but I am not so rash, not so bold as you. I know that I cannot alter a temperament. Mr. Sangster, your opinions are yourself. I could no more change *you* than you could convert one of these red roses into a blade of grass. But may I tell you where I venture to think you are wrong? You are encouraging democracy to look away from the center to the circumference; you are teaching men that it is not their wills that punish them, but the conditions of their lives. That is why the politician is so dangerous, and that is why men like Father Prague lament that the Church has failed to make herself the State."

He replied: "How stupid I must have been in my preaching! Why, my whole effort was to convince you that Radicalism is Christianity in action."

She turned to him quickly. "Oh, but religion is so quiet!"

Everything he had been ready to pour out in a volume

just a moment before went from his mind. He looked at her attentively, without a word. She lowered her eyes. "Don't you think it is?" she asked.

In the House of Commons or at a crowded and excited meeting of working men he would have rapped out a telling answer quickly enough. But there was no "magnetism" in the air of this beautiful rose-garden. Nature was on the side of the lady—Nature who teaches us how deadly a thing in argument is silence. He was oppressed by the calm, by the languid heat, by the scent of the flowers, by the stillness of the trees, by the tranquillity of the woman.

"I wonder," he said suddenly, smiling with the satisfaction of a good idea, "whether you could have turned St. Paul from his fiery crusade!"

She did not raise her eyes. "Do you think," she asked very quietly, and with extreme gentleness, "that you could have persuaded a greater than St. Paul to be strident?"

There was a long pause. She lifted her eyes for a moment, looked at him without a smile, then away from him.

"You conquer me," he said to her, quickly and earnestly, "by a superior spirituality. I acknowledge that. But that superior spirituality has one fault—the fault of all faults (may I say it?), the sin of all sins. Yes; it is selfish. It is like the spirituality of the fakir in Hinduism, the ascetic in Buddhism, the monk in Christianity. While the fakir loses his identity in beatific vision, seventy millions of his fellow Hindus are pariahs and untouchables; while the monk passes from trance to trance, millions of his fellow Christians live below the line of poverty. What! would you do nothing at all? Would you leave things as they are? Would you leave the rich to their own devices and the poor to their own miseries?"

"I wonder," she asked, raising her eyes to him, "whether that question was ever put to Christ!" Then, still looking

at him: "The Baptist, you remember, sent his disciples to ask a very similar question."

"But you do not mean, surely," he demanded, "that Christ was not a social reformer? Why, some men consider that He was the first Anarchist! My own view has always been that Christianity, profoundly understood and logically followed, is Socialism. I came to politics from religion. My politics have become my religion. I cannot conceive of politics without religion. I assure you, on my soul, that the inspiration of my own life is the absolute conviction that Radicalism represents Christianity in action."

Before she could reply a vulgar laugh sounded close behind them, and a voice exclaimed: "Ah, we have found him at last!"

They turned quickly. Girshel was approaching, with Ruth's father at his side.

X

ALTHOUGH Girshel did not wink his eye, nor say anything atrocious, the expression of his face was an insult to Ruth Kingsford. He was sufficiently versed in manners to know that any elaborate apology for intruding or a jocular reference to Adam and Eve in a garden would be insufferable, but his nature was such that the vulgar jest showed in his face all the same. He glanced mischievously from the one to the other, grinning, with that knowing look in his eyes which was abhorrent even in playfulness.

It never occurred to Maurice for a single minute that Girshel might perpetrate so hideous an innuendo, but he did fear very greatly that the vulgar little Jew would in some way smirch him in the sight of Ruth Kingsford. Suppose—oh, good heavens!—suppose he should speak of his "five

and elevenpence halfpennies." Suppose he should call him "Maurice, old boy."

Girshel said: "I've come to congratulate you. I called at your home. The wife told me where you had gone, and I came on here. Well, it's what I prophesied and what I've worked for. In a way, I feel that I am to be congratulated, too." He looked up at Sir Edward Kingsford, winked, and added: "I've pulled the strings for him."

At that moment Father Prague and Leonard came through the opening in the yew-hedge, and approached the group.

"I really don't know what you refer to," said Maurice, rather coldly.

"You don't?" Girshel laughed loudly. "Go ahead," he said. "Why, everybody knows it. It will be in half the papers to-morrow morning. You aren't beginning to put on Cabinet airs already, are you? Not among friends, surely?"

Sir Edward Kingsford smiled. "I had heard a rumor," he said quietly.

"What, in the Cabinet?" inquired Leonard.

"Nonsense, nonsense!" said Maurice firmly, and with annoyance. Then, turning on Girshel, he said: "You are misinformed, and you have committed a blunder."

"Why, I got it from Tom Fowler at luncheon to-day," snapped Girshel. "There was a party of us at the club. Everybody knew it."

Ruth said to her father: "Has Mr. Sangster's friend had some tea?"

Kingsford replied that Girshel had already refused tea, and introduced him to his daughter.

"You know my name, I expect," said Girshel, giving Ruth's hand a vigorous shake, "but not as a politician. I'm building up that reputation more slowly, in the background, behind the scenes—a wire-puller, *comprenez?*"

Maurice was assuring the others that the rumor of a Cabinet appointment was utterly false. Girshel, hearing him, turned his back on Ruth, thrust his way into the group, and began to tell all the gossip he had heard at the club.

Father Prague went to Ruth's side, and presently they walked away.

"I like Mr. Champness," said the priest. "He is an able person, and very modest, not without a dry humor that I find very attractive. What do you think of Mr. Sangster?"

"I think he is crude," replied Ruth, "but he is one of those men who can only do things, and are only interesting by the same token, so long as they don't think. Reflection would kill him. But without reflection he is distinctly a force. Do you feel that?"

Father Prague replied: "I really do not know him at all. I have heard him speak, I have read some of his articles, and I have seen him drinking tea in your garden; but I am sure you are right. He is a quivering line of intuitive rhetoric. Break up that line, and reduce it to philosophy, what would be left? Not even a syllogism. But his friend, Ruth,—his friend——!" Here Father Prague laughed very quietly, glanced at Ruth out of the corners of his eyes, and then said with a forlorn expression of face: "Girshel's, Syrup!"

"He was telling me rather vigorously," said Ruth, "that Radicalism is Christianity in action." At that moment the Jew came round the corner. "What a dénouement!"

"I never thought I should see Mr. Girshel," said Father Prague, with an angry look in his eyes, "but in rather a sad way I have often had him in my thoughts. At one time I almost wanted to strangle him."

"You don't mean that! Why?"

"I think I ought to tell Girshel the story!"

"Well, if it will do him good."

"You feel that he needs improvement?"

"Why do some men send an instant shudder through the soul, almost before one has seen them?"

"Shall I tell him? No, it would hurt his feelings."

"What is the story?"

"It concerns a boy in Derby. He was one of my favorites, and I was bringing him on, hoping to make a priest of him. He worked in a factory, and supported his mother and two sisters, one of whom was an invalid. They lived in the poorest quarter of the town, but more respectable people and a neater home one could find nowhere. Well, the boy was delicate, and began to get ill. Some foolish neighbors recommended Girshel's Syrup—a swindle shown up by the medical authorities again and again. Everything was sacrificed to buy this dreadful stuff. All the savings soon went; then ornaments, then furniture, and presently linen. I tried all I could to dissuade them, but in vain. They regarded me as in league with the doctors. At last the boy collapsed, and had to take to his bed. The mother wrote a beseeching letter to the address on the bottle of Girshel's Syrup. She showed me the answer. All they had to do was to go on with the Syrup, increasing the dose. He lay in a little dark bedroom at the side of the house, with nothing but a blank wall to look at. I used to sit with him every day. They brought the medicine at the proper time, and I watched him gulping it down—the poor, white, emaciated, dying boy! One day, as I entered his room, I noticed that it seemed brighter. He observed my look of surprise, and raised a feeble hand, pointing to the window. 'Well, that's an improvement,' I said. The blank wall was painted white. 'It's brighter in here,' he whispered, 'but it hurts my eyes when the sun's on it.' When I came next day the whole of the white space was occupied with huge letters announcing 'Girshel's Syrup cures everything.' Well, that's the story. He died with the lie looking at him

through the window. That was what he saw every time he raised his eyes."

For some moments Ruth said nothing. They walked towards the house in silence, for Father Prague had revived memories which busied his thoughts. "I wonder," said Ruth, "if any of this poor boy's money has gone to swell the funds of Christianity in action?" Then, slowing in her walk and turning round, she added: "No, I don't think you could tell him that story. You might, however, write to him about it; but I feel as if I must, I really must tell that story to our demagogue."

"Oh, you couldn't!"

"Yes, I want to rescue religion from politics."

He stopped. "My dear Ruth," he exclaimed, "what do you mean by that? Why, our whole effort, surely, is to Christianize politics!"

"You can't do that."

"Are you sure? My own feeling is that the future of religion is alliance with democracy. I'm too much of a theologian to be certain, too little of a politician to be dogmatic; but one of my dreams lies there. I want religion to be the inspiration of our national life, and politics the expression of that inspiration."

"But when religion is the inspiration of national life, will there be any need for politics?"

"Certainly, for politics must change the social evil in the world!"

"Do you mean that you can overcome evil by Act of Parliament?"

"I mean that the State can circumscribe evil, that it can make it exceedingly difficult for a man to do evil. Girshel, for example. A righteous State would wipe him out."

"Aren't you speaking of morality?"

"But isn't morality an action of the religious conscience? That is all I mean by Christianizing politics."

"A moral Girshel could help you?"

"Certainly."

"Any moral Jew could help you?"

"Why not?"

"But religion is Christianity?"

"Christianity is widening its borders. Why do you want to restrict it, Ruth? Is that not one of the dangers of the Vatican? Isn't that why democracy in Europe is rising against the Church? I don't like you to be rigid, even in a theory. I can't believe you are, either. Come, you are not, are you? Agree with me now, like a good obedient girl, that religion in the past has been too exclusive, too aristocratic, too conservative. Suppose the Church had spent herself through the long centuries when she was fighting for temporal power in teaching democracy the religion of her Master. Why, earth had been Paradise by now."

She put her hand through his arm, and walked him forward. "Well," she declared, "for a clever man, for the famous writer of brilliant books, for the eminent champion of theological dogma against the theories of a partial science, that is the most boneless, rickety argument I ever heard in my life! Dear man, you have destroyed yourself! Why, the Church's strife for temporal power was a political strife, the very strife you wish her to renew to-day, and by your own showing it was a failure. Come, I want the Church to-day to be doing what you wish she had been doing all through those wasted centuries. I want her to be teaching. To strive, to oppose, to wage war?—no, a hundred times, no! Think for a moment. Can you contemplate the Church as a military power? Do you like the idea of trumpets, and banners, and swords, in connection with the religion of the heart? Does it thrill you or shock you to think of the Little Flock marching to war in stiff uniforms, the heads held high, the bugles blowing, the

flags fluttering, their weapons shining in the sun? You know it shocks you; you know it does. People who speak like that, men of the mold of Mr. Sangster, think of religion as if it were morality. They always forget," she added quietly, "the Cross."

He was about to answer when the others appeared.

Maurice detached himself from Girshel, and hastened to Ruth. "I am obliged to go, Miss Kingsford," he said quietly, as if he had much to say, and would say it out of Girshel's hearing. "I wish our conversation had not been interrupted. I want to know whether you will let me renew it some day. May Leonard bring me again?"

"I want to say something more," she answered, "before you go." She walked with him slowly in advance of the others, turning on to the lawn and letting them go by. Then she stopped and looked at him. "As it happens," she said, "interruption came at the very moment when I was going to ask you if *I* might preach. I feel very keenly about something you had just said. There isn't time for preaching now, but may I ask you, because I admire you and because I see that you can so easily be a power for good in the difficult future, to remember what we were saying and how we were interrupted?"

He tried to follow her meaning. "I'm afraid," he said, "I don't understand."

"You were telling me that Radicalism is Christianity in action."

"Yes."

"And at that moment Mr. Girshel came to congratulate you——"

She saw how his face whitened; she saw swift pain in his eyes, pain and vexation, and she saw annoyance harden at his mouth. She hastened to say, leaning a little towards him and speaking with extreme gentleness: "There are Jews on my side as well. I don't feel that Jews should

be excluded from politics. In business matters, in the sphere of morals, Jews can serve the State as well as Christians. My father says that some of the finest and noblest men he knows in London are Jews. But all this helps me to see that politics must not be confounded in any way with religion. Moralize politics, Mr. Sangster, moralize them as hard as ever you can. You are a fighter, a splendid fighter, and morals is the sphere of the fighter; but religion ought not to appear on the platform. Religion," she added, drawing in her breath quickly, and speaking with a sudden accession of pride which made him think her more beautiful than ever—"religion should never appear in the arena, except as a martyr."

The voice of Girshel came to them, calling Maurice. They looked up, and saw him standing by the house beckoning. He had his watch in his hand.

Maurice regarded him for a moment, and then turned his back. "I can't see your point of view," he said. "You won't think me so dense as to decide that I have missed your point of view simply because I disagree with your conclusion. There are, indeed, moments in my life when I feel as you do. In the past I had one ambition—to be a preacher. But I want to tell you this: *Religion is what the comfortable classes fear more than anything else.* Religion is destined to destroy them. They know it. I have come to this belief; it is the center of my life. And do you know why religion must arm herself, and come out of the cloister and enter the arena, not as a martyr, but as a conqueror? Because she is opposed by the world. The world forces her to fight."

He put out his hand, and she took it without a smile, almost abstractedly, thinking of what he had said.

"As for this Girshel," he added, catching sight of the little monkey with vexation as he advanced towards the house, "he can be used as one uses a servant."

"I wonder," she inquired, "if you have ever had time to read the lives of the mystics?"

"No," he answered with decision. "I began with Luther, and I have gone on following the line of the reformers."

"You will never have time now," she said, with a smile.

"I am a politician," he replied. "I'm afraid not."

"It is very difficult for me to think of religion without the mystics," she said. "Almost as difficult as thinking of mysticism in the House of Commons."

"My dear boy," laughed Girshel, "if you don't come at once I shall pull you." He caught hold of Maurice's arm, and held him while he offered his hand to Ruth. "If he is like this now," he said, "what will he be like when he is in the Cabinet?"

XI

FOR a long time after his first meeting with her Maurice was haunted by Ruth Kingsford. He was easily able to refute her arguments when he got away from her, but he could not rid himself of the impression she had made upon him. This impression was the distinct and vital impression of a very first-rate personality. He thought of her as one superior to himself, and not only intellectually superior. She was superior to him as a human being.

It savaged him to think that Girshel had spoken to his mother with a freedom and a patronage which he dared not employ in the case of Ruth Kingsford. The Jew had treated his mother as a comical old body, to be chaffed, to be winked at, to be humored, and put on one side. And yet, compare his mother's life with the life of Ruth Kingsford! In God's sight, which stood the higher?

He said to himself: "My mother has lived the life of a

servant. She has done all the hard and laborious work that a servant does. In addition, she has kept house on a pittance, she has brought up a large family, and she has shared in the life of the chapel. The wives of small shopkeepers are servants. They are cook, housemaid, parlormaid, and mother. And Girshel takes liberties with such a woman as my mother, just as the grocer's man, the butcher's man, takes liberties with servants at the back-door. But Miss Kingsford, he was respectful to her! Why? Why should he be more respectful to her than to my mother? What has she done? Bred in luxury, supplied with everything to make life easy and beautiful, from childhood to now she has never soiled her hands or suffered one ache from labor. She is one of the drones. She is clever because she has had masters provided for her, and nothing else to do but study. She is beautiful because she has never toiled, never suffered, never known the bitterness of poverty and the anxiety of a family. My mother is a thousand times the greater woman."

But he found it so hard to convince himself that his mother really was a superior being to Ruth Kingsford, that he escaped from the horror of disloyal thoughts by fastening his rage upon Girshel.

On their walk home he had told the Jew very sternly and sharply that it was an outrageous thing to follow him to the house of strangers and burst in with an absurd rumor. "I want you to understand," he said, "that I do not regard you as my benefactor. You are assuming a relationship which I not only will not recognize, but which I decisively repudiate. I do work for you, and you pay me for it. In exchange for your money you get my labor. Such a connection does not establish you as my patron."

And Girshel had replied: "You wouldn't dare to talk like this, old boy, if you weren't certain of the Cabinet! Now I *know* it's a fact. I congratulate you again. But be

careful. You'll need me a long time yet. Suppose the Government goes out! How will you manage then? Your family is growing, dear boy. It will be more expensive for you every year. You'd better stick to the man who first pulled the strings for you."

They went to the office of the *London Herald*, and Maurice was able to convince Tom Fowler that the rumor of a Cabinet appointment was entirely without foundation. "I was sounded late last night," he told the editor, "by someone who had no real authority as to whether I would accept a very minor office. That is all, I assure you. There is nothing in the rumor beyond that."

"And you refused?" Tom Fowler asked.

"Yes."

"Ah!" exclaimed Fowler and Girshel together. The Jew looked at the editor and winked.

When they left the newspaper office, Girshel put his arm through Maurice's and said to him: "Perhaps we had better have a little quiet talk. Things are maturing rather quicker than I expected. We'll go to the club."

"No," replied Maurice; "I've got work to do. I'm going home."

"Come and see me at my office, then," said the Jew rather peremptorily. "Come to-morrow morning at twelve o'clock. I could see you then for half an hour."

"I shall be too busy. Besides, what is there to say?"

"I don't like your manner, my friend. Are you trying to shake me off?"

"I very much resent your behavior this afternoon."

"Let's understand each other. You had better come to the club, after all. It's no use playing a game of cross-purposes."

"I am going home."

"All right, then." Girshel stopped a hansom. "We'll go together."

In the cab he said to Maurice: "How do we stand? Let's be honest. You want to be rid of me, is that it?"

"I want you to mend your manners, that's all."

The cabman whipped his horse, which was one of those little hog-maned, prick-eared cab-horses familiar in the days of the hansom. It quickened its even trot in response to the whip without a movement of bad temper. The bell on its cheek-strap sent a cheerful music through the empty Sunday streets.

"Shall I tell you what you mean?" demanded Girshel. "You mean that your Radical soul is cooling! Liberalism baits its hook with office, and good-by, say you, to Radicalism. My manners, hey! What about *your morals*? Ha! Do you think I can't read you? My friend, that's my business. That's how I spend my day; that's how I make my money—reading men. Look, I've been deceived in you. What a fool I must have been, you think. Not so quick! If you play me false, dear sir, I'll spend every penny I've got to drive you out of politics. How? Do you think it would be difficult? Chut! I could make your reputation smell like a bad herring from one end of the country to the other. Now, that's me. I play fair. I conceal nothing. You'll find me honest, mightily honest, and no assassin. Don't fear a stab in the back. That's not my way. It will be a blow in the face, an open blow, and not till you're standing on guard. My boy, you've written enough in my paper to hang you as a Liberal. Don't forget that! And the man who keeps the files is a rich man—a man who can afford to run two and three candidates against you in every constituency you go for. Why, I could break you as easily, as cheaply, as I could break an egg."

Maurice made no answer. He was leaning forward, his arms on the doors of the cab, his eyes gazing ahead into the gloom of an empty street between the two lines of lamps.

"Well, what do you say?" demanded Girshel.

No answer being vouchsafed, the Jew repeated his question with greater assurance, striking his companion's arm.

"Go to hell!" answered Maurice, without turning his head or shifting his position.

He said it slowly, quietly, and with a perfect self-possession. One might have thought he had been used all his life to language of a like violence, but in truth it was the strongest expression that had ever escaped him.

Long afterwards he remembered that while the Jew was addressing him and threatening him, and really convincing him that his future was hopelessly in Girshel's hands, the thought came to him that the bell on the horse had caught the sound of the little bell on his father's shop-door; and it seemed to him then that he was sick of politics, sick of journalism, sick of his struggle to earn money for his family, and that he would give all he possessed to be at home with his mother—his mother, who lived the life of a servant.

But as soon as the petulant exclamation had escaped him he was filled with horror. His eyes dilated, his body turned cold. He said to himself: "I am a sinner!" and the doctrine of his fervorous youth, the doctrine of Entire Sanctification, rose up before him like a rebukeful ghost whose eyes are wet with tears. He did not change his attitude. He did not consider that now he had really ruined himself with Girshel. He only thought: "What I must be in my heart to use an expression like that!"

Girshel touched his arm. "I'll give you five minutes," he said. Then, after a pause: "I don't want to take advantage of your bad temper. I'm not like that. But I'll put you a question, and I'll give you five minutes to consider your answer." He pulled out his watch, held it forward for the light of the lamps to fall upon the dial, and concluded:

"Now, is that your last word to me—your last word to me—that I am to go to hell?"

The cabman's whip came down sharply on the little horse, and again it quickened its even pace without resentment. Maurice noticed how rhythmically the harness bumped on the animal's back, how steadily it trotted, how perpetually the ears moved backwards and forwards, almost as if they were claws.

They were climbing a slight hill. There were tram lines in the center of the road. At every corner was a public house, with a crowd of men and women loafing at the doors. Occasionally, they passed a church or chapel, from which the congregations were emptying—dark figures against the background of the bright doorways.

Girshel put away his watch, and pulled a cigar-case from his pocket. He was looking about him, no grin on his face, a malicious evil light in his eyes. He bit the end off his cigar, spat it out of his mouth, and felt in his pockets for a match-box.

"Don't be in any hurry," he said, with the cigar in his mouth. "You've got to decide, remember, whether you'll travel with me or without me." He struck a match and lighted his cigar. "You've got to make up your mind whether you'll have me fighting with you or against you," he concluded, throwing away the match.

Maurice heard what he said, and was conscious of the smell of the cigar smoke, which he thought pleasant and soothing. But he was thinking of the people round the public houses, noisy, hilarious crowds, composed for the greater part of young clerks and women of the street. He was interested in one case by a violent dispute at the doors of a tavern, where six or seven women were quarreling very violently among themselves, while a number of tipsy young men, striving to pacify them, only seemed to make matters worse. Maurice had the feeling that he would like to stop

and see the end of this brawl. A week later he remembered it because of a murder which shocked London, and wondered if the young victim had been among those drunken women clawing at each other in the streets.

He thought to himself as the cab swung through the noisy streets: "How are we going to alter all this? Does democracy want to be better?" And this reflection set him thinking about Ruth Kingsford.

All of a sudden he turned to Girshel, looked at him very hard, and asked: "What was it I said to you?"

Girshel met his gaze. "You told me," he said, working his lips rather savagely, "to go to hell."

"Then why the devil haven't you gone there?" demanded Maurice, jerking his face so close to the Jew's that he could feel the heat from the cigar.

Something in this action, something in his eyes, made the Jew draw back hastily.

Maurice followed him round. "Get out of this cab," he said sharply, and raised his hand to the trap-door. "You blackmailer!" he ended savagely. Then to the cabman: "Stop!"

The cab skidded on the tram-lines for a moment, so that Girshel was thrown against Maurice. Then it drew to the side of the pavement, and came to a standstill.

"You have taken a liberty," said Maurice, "for which I will never forgive you. You have endeavored to intimidate me, for which I will punish you. You are a Jew, and the son of a Jew—a rogue, a swindler, and a swaggering little cad! Do your worst. I'll smash you to powder."

Girshel replied: "You are in a bad temper. You don't mean what you say. To-morrow you will be sorry for it." He opened the doors of the cab. "Shall I go, or will you think over it while I sit at your side for the rest of the journey? I don't want to judge a hasty man. I am not that sort of fellow."

"I've done with you!" replied Maurice.

"All right. But you have only done with me for the present." Girshel put his cigar in his mouth, got up, and turned to Maurice as he stood, unnecessarily crouched up, under the reins. "After all, this is my cab," he said. "Don't you think it would be more fitting if *you* got out?"

Maurice caught him by the arm, and pulled him roughly into the cab. At the same moment he was on his feet. He jumped out of the vehicle, and walked away without another word.

When he got home, he found his wife in a state of great anxiety about one of the children, who had caught a very bad cold two days before, and whose temperature had gone up to 102°. The doctor had been in the afternoon, and was to return later in the evening.

It was difficult for Maurice to collect his thoughts. He said: "I expect it will be all right," and went with her to the room where the child lay. Phœbe did not observe anything unusual in his appearance; she was too preoccupied with this domestic catastrophe. Maurice went to the cot where the child lay in feverish unrest. The bedclothes were kicked off, the little nightshirt was pulled up, the child's blazing cheeks contrasted violently with the white body, the eyes were glazed with delirium. Phœbe uttered some soothing words, and leaned over the cot to pull down the nightshirt and draw a sheet over the child. But the child pouted and frowned, gave a little cry of petulant anger, kicking down the sheet, pulling up his nightshirt, and rolling his head vexatiously on the pillow. Maurice bent over the cot, and put his hand to the child's head. He was startled by the fiery heat. The child gazed at him with a wild gratitude; caught hold of his hand, and drew it to the side of its head, pressing it there close to the neck. Then, when the cold hand had become hot, and could no more comfort it, the child flung it off, moaned piteously,

tossed passionately from side to side, and, before they could prevent it, banged its head fiercely against the rails of the cot.

"Oh, Maurice, Maurice!" Phœbe whispered, clutching at his arm. "What are we to do? I'm afraid—I'm so afraid!"

He replied: "The doctor will be coming soon."

She went to the dressing-table, emptied some eau-de-Cologne on a handkerchief, and returned to the cot, bathing the child's brow and pressing the handkerchief behind the ears. The nurse entered the room with a cooling draught. "I'm sure he's more feverish," Phœbe whispered to her. The nurse nodded: "Yes, the temperature is going up."

Maurice went downstairs to his room. He could do nothing to help. He lighted the gas in his study, and sat down in a chair by the fireplace, wondering what he should do to provide for his family.

In half an hour Phœbe came to him. She was very white and trembling. "Maurice," she said, slipping down on her knees at his side, "I want you to pray with me. I'm frightened!" She burst into tears, and pressed her face to his arm, sobbing. He laid a hand on her hair, told her not to worry, said that the doctor would surely be able to put matters right. Children, he assured her, were often like this. They talked for several minutes, and then Phœbe dried her eyes, saying: "I will try to be brave, but pray with me, Maurice. I want you to ask God to spare our darling's life."

He replied: "Let us wait till the doctor has been. I don't feel as if I could pray properly just now."

"You are afraid he will die!" she cried piteously, gazing at him with terror.

"No, it isn't that. Later, Phœbe—later. When we are in our room together."

The doctor was able to comfort Phœbe. The fever, he

said, was running its natural course. There was no need for anxiety, none whatever. At the same time, if Phœbe would like to have a trained nurse in the house, he would send for one. But Phœbe wanted to do everything for the child herself.

When the doctor had gone, the servant came to remind Phœbe that supper had been ready for a long time. "I can eat nothing," she answered; but she insisted that Maurice should go to the dining-room. He ate a little food, and returned to his study.

It was after midnight when he went upstairs to bed. The door of the child's room was half open; a table stood outside with a tray and bottles; a night-light was burning on the chest of drawers in a saucer of water; he could see Phœbe sitting motionless beside the cot; the noise of the child's subdued moaning came to him very clearly. He looked at Phœbe, and she bowed her head to show that she saw him, placing a finger to her lips, as if to warn him against waking the invalid. He passed on and went to his room. He remembered that he had promised to pray with his wife; but he felt that he could not even pray for himself.

Early on the following morning Phœbe came to him with the good news that the child was much better. She brought him a cup of tea. It was a beautiful fresh morning, but the sun coming in at his window, and Phœbe entering with this excellent piece of news, did not give Maurice any lively feeling of relief or happiness. As he sat up in bed, drinking his tea, and looking at Phœbe, who was fresh and cheerful in spite of her long vigil, he thought to himself, "I have made a fool of myself."

"Something is worrying you?" she inquired, after a moment. There was just a touch of disappointment in this remark.

"No; I assure you. Why, what makes you ask?"

"You don't seem to be very glad of my good news; that was all!"

"I am very glad indeed; of course I am. But I felt certain it would be all right; I told you so last night."

A servant entered the room with his letters. He looked through the envelopes hastily, selected one in Girshel's handwriting, opened it, and said to his wife: "I had a row yesterday with Mr. Girshel. I'm not going to work for him any more."

"I'm glad of that," she answered; "but what will you do instead?"

He did not answer. The letter was very brief. It merely inquired whether Maurice intended to send any further contributions to the paper. "There is no need for you to do so," the letter concluded, "as I have another Member of Parliament ready to continue the Diary."

He put the letter aside, glanced again at the other envelopes, and said, "I must get up." Phoebe went to the bathroom to turn on the water for him.

Maurice left the house immediately after breakfast. He called upon the philosophical Radical whom he had met at Ravenstruther's, and with whom he was now on a very friendly footing. They lunched together at the Reform Club, and walked across St. James's Park to the House of Commons.

At seven o'clock Phoebe heard a bawling voice coming up the street. She went to the window and looked out. A boy was running along the pavement with newspapers under his arm and a placard over his legs. She saw the words, "Defeat of the Government," and wondered what that might mean to Maurice.

Girshel did not hear the news till nine o'clock. He was at his home in Finchley Road, with a journalist who made a modest income as a political humorist.

"We'll print those extracts and publish them as a

pamphlet!" he chuckled. "We'll issue five hundred thousand of them, free. Every soul in Bursby shall have a couple. And we'll call it 'Bursby's Radical Member: What He Has Said.'"

"And under that," said the journalist, "put a big black question mark, followed by, '*What Has He Done?*'"

"Yes, that's not bad. *What Has He Done!* But we must have pictures. I want pictures on all the walls—comic ones, colored comic pictures. The thing is to show him up as a humbug, as a man who got into the House as a Radical, and is now blacking the boots of the Liberals, sucking up to 'em for office. Some fellow could make a picture of a soldier sneaking off to join the enemy. Call it *The Deserter*. That's a name that will stick. Yes, I like that—*The Deserter*. Bursby's back would go up. Bursby's the kind of place that hates a traitor more than anything else."

"How about a huge poster showing him in the character of Pecksniff?" inquired the journalist, opening his eyes in admiration of his own suggestion.

"No good at all. Bursby knows nothing about Pecksniff. No; what we want is plain, hard-hitting common sense. Keep off literature and all that sort of thing. I don't mind caricatures of advertisements; people know them; but art and literature—no good at all."

They were interrupted by the arrival of Girshel's editor.

"Heard the news?" he asked.

"What news?" demanded Girshel.

"Government's defeated!"

Girshel sprang to his feet, laughing delightedly. "Is it true—really true?"

"Absolutely."

"Then a Tory will get in for Bursby!" said the Jew, rubbing his hands.

"Sangster made a smashing speech; pulverized the Old Man; broke him all to pieces——"

Girshel's jaw dropped. "What do you say?"

"The Government was beaten by Sangster," announced the editor. "He opposed them over Egypt; said the country was sick of their broken promises; told the Old Man that he had done nothing for the people, nothing that made a difference to their lives, for thirty years—he called them the Thirty Years' War. He said straight out that while the Old Man had been filibustering all over the world and tinkering at the Constitution at home, working himself up to a white heat over the job and professing to be the people's friend—the holy apostle of peace, retrenchment, and reform—the state of the poor had been getting rapidly and terribly worse. My word, he really smashed the Old Man! There's one passage in the speech about slums that beats anything Sangster ever said. He quoted something the Old Man had said about the cry of the Christians in Macedonia, and told him that if he would curb his rhetoric and listen for a moment he might hear the wailing of little children in English slums, starving for food, dying of fever, beating their heads against the walls of cellars and dog-holes. It was a real crusher, and no mistake! He took thirty-three Liberals with him into the lobby."

Girshel turned to the humorous journalist. "We're beaten, too," he said.

"I'm afraid we are," answered the humorist.

"For the present," said Girshel.

The Tories won the General Election. Maurice Sangster was returned by an overwhelming majority for Bursby, and became immediately one of their deadliest critics. The retirement of the famous Liberal Prime Minister brought Maurice into greater prominence, but he remained on the cross-benches, and the Opposition Leaders, though they profited by his attacks on the Government, deplored his methods and his Radicalism.

PART III

THE HOUSE OF DECEIT

I

You will observe a notable change in Maurice Sangster. The razor has swept away every vestige of hair from his face; the scissors have brought his dark hair to a reasonable brevity. He wears his clothes with an air; he is less feverish in his movements; he has acquired the deep thinking, the long reflecting, and the rather sad austerity of a Cabinet Minister.

Certainly he has broadened his mind.

If you were to see him in his study at night—his new house is in Kensington—sitting at ease, almost lounging one might say, with two or three influential men of the party, smoking a cigarette, drinking whisky-and-soda, and occasionally making use of a slang word to humanize his vigorous opinions, you would admit that he has advanced from a hot-headed youth to a middle-age of orthodox sobriety. And the change would not seem to you so violent as it appears in a written statement if you listened to his conversation, and realized the strength of the influences which have been brought to bear upon him. He is full of generosity, and laughs quite pleasantly and indulgently without blinking his eyelids, when he speaks of his early enthusiasm as a politician. He is no longer a visionary. Circumstance has made him a practical man of affairs.

He is now a statesman—the Home Secretary in a Government which has to be very careful what it does in

rousing the wrath of vested interests. He has conquered the Whigs, and is the Radical master of his party; but he is a statesman, and perceives that while passionate speeches in the country are permissible—nay, even useful and profitable—violent legislation in the House of Commons would be perilous. He is biding his time. He has lost nothing of his sincerity. More earnest and convinced Radical never held Cabinet rank in a Victorian Government. He says everything when he tells his friends, "What we have to do is to educate democracy."

Almost as great a statesman as Maurice Sangster is Phœbe his wife.

When she discovered that the dismissal of Girshel meant a very diminished income, and when she perceived that Maurice's political struggle could not possibly be combined with a money-earning journalistic career, like a hen alarmed for the safety of her chickens she gathered her little family under her wings, and set herself to defend them against the hardships and cruelties of a materialistic world. How she worked for her children, how she economized in her housekeeping, how she denied herself many things which custom had rendered almost essential to her existence—this would be as wearisome to tell as it was difficult for Phœbe to accomplish.

She never forgot the white and haggard face, the feverish eyes, and the frowning brow of her husband when she went to him in the early days of this great struggle, telling him that the tradesmen's books, hitherto paid every week, were now a month overdue. The poor fellow was wrestling at that time with an enormous correspondence; he was making speeches all over the country; he was in constant conference with the Radicals of the party; and he was directing a tremendous campaign in his own constituency. He looked up from his writing-table at Phœbe, asked her to repeat what she had said, turned very white, passed his

hand over his forehead, looked away from her, frowned, got up from his chair, and replied: "They must wait. It will be all right in a few weeks. I must do some writing. In a month or two I shall be earning money."

And there was another occasion which Phœbe never forgot. One of the children had written her first letter, and this letter, planned by mother and child, was addressed to Maurice. Phœbe, very proud and happy, took the child, carrying this wonderful letter, to see Maurice in his study. They found him at his table, answering correspondents on a pile of postcards. The child broke free from her mother directly the door was open, ran to her father, and pressed the letter against his body, crying out: "I wrote it all by myself! Mother didn't hold my hand! It's for you; I wrote it for you!"

He could not understand what this invasion meant. His head was hot, his fingers aching, his whole mind was concentrated on a General Election. He looked up at Phœbe, and said: "I really must not be interrupted. What is it? What is it? You see how busy I am. Can't it wait till lunch-time? I do beg you to see that I am not disturbed in the morning." And as they went away, very sorrowfully, he called out: "You see, it's a matter of life or death to us that I should carry this thing through."

Phœbe decided, after a long conversation with her brother Leonard, who very cheerfully and insistently lent her fifty pounds for immediate necessities, that she should go to her father for financial assistance. They agreed that Maurice had better not be told; and they also agreed that the best way of approach to old Humphry Champness would be through Aunt Mildred. And so Phœbe told Aunt Mildred, on one of her regular visits, how matters stood with the Sangster household, and Aunt Mildred decided to take action that very night.

None of them knew how rich old Champness was; Jig-

gens did not know; his partners did not know; only his bankers were aware that the financier had a capital of nearly half a million very wisely invested all over the civilized and uncivilized world. But Aunt Mildred, whose household expenditure never exceeded five hundred a year, knew that her brother could well afford to make his children an allowance; and she felt, above everything else, that it was a dreadful state of things for father and children to exist in a condition of veiled hostility.

It fortuneed that when she approached the old man he was in a very bad humor. It seemed that he had been run into and nearly overturned that morning by his own secretary, Christopher Jiggins, who, issuing suddenly from a tavern in Old Broad Street, turning his head to shout a last cheerful word to the friends he had left drinking at the bar, had bumped right into Mr. Champness. Jiggins was now a heavyweight. He **had** lost the distinguished appearance of his earlier days, and looked more like a retired policeman than a cavalry officer. His face was red and fattish; his shoulders were heavy; his paunch was stoutly and aggressively middle-aged. It is one of the misfortunes of a life devoted to money-making that the elegance of youth, the fine swaggering dash of early manhood, and the distinguished appearance of later years, merge eventually into an unmistakable commercialism. Jiggins still wore fine clothes; but they were now disastrously too tight for him; moreover, the dust of the City of London seemed not only to settle on them, but to work its way into them; his very hat had a soiled appearance.

Old Champness continued his way full of wrath and indignation. He began to suspect his secretary. Jiggins, to save the old man, and before he quite realized who it was he had bumped into, had caught him affectionately in his arms, and had laughed his apologies full in his victim's face—apologies which reeked of whisky. “He drinks; at

eleven o'clock in the morning; and with jobbers—low jobbers," said the old man to himself; "I'll warrant he's a gambler."

That afternoon he had a stern encounter with Mr. Jiggins. He discovered that Jiggins was carrying over a number of highly speculative shares, shares that only a fool would dabble with; and this fact, added to his discovery that Jiggins was in the habit of drinking in wine bars, put the old man into a state of great irascibility. He told Jiggins very roundly that he was a fool, and said he would think over the matter.

Now, you might conjecture that Aunt Mildred could not have approached her tyrannical brother in a worse hour. On the contrary, it was the most propitious hour she could have chosen. As soon as she broached the subject, and as soon as he perceived that Phoebe was in real financial difficulties, old Champness felt a deep wave of satisfaction passing over his heart, washing away all memory of Jiggins.

"So our politician is not earning a thousand a year any longer?" he inquired. "Poor fellow! I'm sorry for him. He must feel his position keenly. A conscience like that——! But we must help him. I like your idea that he should not be told. That is wise; wise and proper. We must spare his feelings. No; he must certainly not be told."

Phoebe was received into the paternal bosom. Perhaps the old man was genuinely touched by her broken words, her troubled face, her tears and her sobs. Perhaps the abandonment of the middle-aged mother revived in his mind memories of her childhood, when he would take her on his knees, kiss away her tears, and comfort her with kind words. He certainly fondled her, kissed her forehead, patted her arm, and assured her very generously that he would see she came to no harm. But it is almost certain

that the allowance he made to her—an allowance of fifteen hundred pounds a year—was dictated by vengeance. There is no question that he hated Maurice Sangster very savagely, and longed above most things in life to humiliate him. He would have liked to break him as a politician, but this being beyond his powers, he took a delight in providing for him in secret. Again and again he cautioned Phœbe against disclosing the source of her supplies.

“His feelings must not be hurt,” he kept saying. “He is very high-minded and sensitive; he is so busy he will not know whether the bills are paid or not; say nothing to him on the subject; tell him not to worry; don’t let him know you have got a bank account.” And Phœbe, overjoyed by this thoughtfulness on the old man’s part, begged her father to let her bring Maurice to see him, saying that she was quite sure he thought highly of Mr. Champness in his heart and was grieved by the misunderstanding in the past.

Whether Maurice ever guessed where the money came from which relieved him from the burden of journalism, or whether, as old Champness prophesied, he was so absorbed in his work that such a matter as housekeeping never entered his head, we are unable to say; but it is certain that he never even questioned Phœbe as to ways and means, and very seldom indeed put himself to the trouble of earning any money.

And when the Liberal Party came back to power, and he was made Home Secretary, he moved from Camden Town to a larger house in Kensington without the smallest misgiving about the future. “We are perfectly safe now,” he said to Phœbe; “the Tories will never come back. I have smashed them to pieces.” But Phœbe, who looked ahead, feared for her children, and consulted with Aunt Mildred and her father. They told her to be careful with her money, reasonably careful, but to employ good governesses for the children, and to entertain Maurice’s friends

with the hospitality that would be expected of a Cabinet Minister. Old Champness discovered that Maurice allowed his wife two thousand pounds a year, and she paid for everything out of this—house-rent included. He thought the matter over for a week, and then told her that he had decided to buy the house. "Say nothing to your husband," he said, "or he'll cut down your allowance!"

So Phœbe looking ahead, still skimped and contrived, cutting down expenses, overlooking the servants with an assiduous care, and managing her house and her children with the thoroughness of a good German.

Aunt Mildred was not so successful in the diplomacy she employed on behalf of Leonard. Old Champness said very firmly that he would spend not a single penny on a man who was under the thumb of a set of rascally priests. He expressed no antagonistic feelings for Leonard himself; he even went so far as to say that the young man would always be welcome to a place at his table; but he was adamant on the question of money. "Mark my words," he told his sister, "Leonard will end his days as a Papist. Every time I see him I notice that silly look in his face which always comes with idolatry. He'll turn Papist, depend on it." One thing he was determined about; no money of his should make that road easier. He loathed Rome with all the long heredity of an iron Protestantism; this hatred was the center of his religious life.

As for Leonard, he really did not want his father's money. He could now earn three or four hundred a year; his personal expenses seldom exceeded two hundred; and he had quite abandoned all idea of marrying Ruth Kingsford. He went very often to Hampstead—nearly every Sunday, one might say—and he frequently met Ruth at Phœbe's house, for Maurice had taken Phœbe to call on the Kingsfords, and the politician and the mystic were now on terms of considerable friendship. But Leonard re-

garded Miss Kingsford as the perfect woman, the saint of his dreams, the unattainable beauty of his soul. He was content to love her as a part of his inward life. She consecrated his purest thoughts. To be her friend was a pleasure very deep and satisfying; to think about her as the angel of his soul was the nearest he ever got to rapture and ecstasy.

Ruth, for her part, was interested in three men; she shared the strength of her mind between Father Prague, Leonard Champness, and Maurice Sangster. She found that she could help these three men, and their struggles appealed to her serenity. Father Prague, hungering and thirsting for an authentic tradition, for an institutional religion which had its foundations fastened in the very rock of Christian origin, was encouraged by her teaching to contemplate union with Rome. Leonard Champness, finding his reason at variance with Christian dogma, learned from Ruth Kingsford that there is a mystical interpretation of dogma. And Maurice Sangster—to Ruth Kingsford this crude and powerful man of action made another appeal: perhaps he appealed to her heart more than Father Prague—certainly more than Leonard Champness. She admired him; she grew to understand him. If her influence refined him, his influence certainly widened her knowledge of life; and she knew that he came to her for something nearer to the heart than politics, something which made her proud to feel that she could give him, and something which she felt herself secure enough to give him without danger.

She said to him once: "You are still sincere, just as sincere as when we first met; but your motives have changed."

"I know," he answered; "that is perfectly true. And yet one might say that I started without any motive at all."

"Oh no; you certainly had a motive!"

"I don't think so. You can't call an unthinking religious enthusiasm a motive. But now I have a rational motive. I have traveled from enthusiasm to science—perhaps to æsthetics. I want to make the social organism more efficient; I want to make life less hideous and ugly; I find I get more inspiration from doctors than from parsons."

"And yet religion is at the back of it all, is it not?"

"I suppose so. I am not sure. Yes, I think it is. But not my old idea of religion."

"No; that is true."

"I was frightfully narrow! What a mercy it is that the mind grows, that it has the power to fling off even the most tenacious influences of youth. I was a prig, a terrible prig. You could have put my idea of God into a match box!"

"What has changed you, do you think?"

"Acquaintance with man. Knowledge of the world. I started with the idea that society divided itself into two groups; on one side was the vicious group which possessed everything, which hated God, and which obstructed progress; on the other, the group which sought to advance in virtue and righteousness, but could not because of obstruction from the other group. Can you imagine anything more stupid and naïve? I see now that the real obstruction to progress is the heart of democracy itself. Instead of attacking other people, my work lies now in stirring up democracy to want progress, to want virtue, to want decency and comfort."

"Yes; I have noticed that change, and it is all for the good. But don't forget, you stir up democracy by attacking the rich! You never attack democracy itself."

"Oh, in the country one has to shout. It is different in the House of Commons. And remember, party politics is still something of a game. You have no idea how difficult

it is to get anything done. A man goes into politics with dreams; he means to change the world; and he discovers that the world is a very vast and intricate machine in which every nut and bolt is guarded by powerful forces. He can't dream any longer. His main work is to stick where he is. His accomplishment can be little more than fiddling about with an oil can."

"Yes," said Ruth, nodding her head, "very little more than that. The world changes men, but men cannot change the world. You know, don't you, that the world has changed you? I think it changes the man who seeks to change it more decisively than anybody else."

"But I still mean to change the world. The thing is to wake up democracy; after that change will come at a flood. Wait a decade, wait a decade! But the work is hard. I assure you it is a sordid and a dreary business. Sometimes I am sick to death of it. I come to you when I am out of love with my life, because you give me a fresh impetus. Even when you criticize me, you encourage me. You are always so calm, your ideals never change, and you are so restful. Do you know that I count your friendship the most precious thing in my life?"

"In your political life," she said, quietly and firmly.

"In my political life? But I have no other. One can't go into politics, if one means business, and not be absorbed by it."

"That, I should say, is a condemnation of politics."

"No doubt; but it is a fact. One can't play at politics. The man who uses the House of Commons as a club is not a politician. The real politician is a man who has the passion for government in his veins. Someone said to me the other day, and I believe it is true, that the real politician, the man whose ambition is to control the government of an enormous empire like ours, can only have one other interest."

She did not make any comment.

"Do you know what he meant?"

"Well, perhaps I can guess."

"Love for one woman."

"Yes; one has read of such things."

"I believe it is true."

"Generalizations like that always seem to me rather foolish; and dangerous, too. One can think of many great statesmen. . . ."

"Oh, no doubt. It was just an idea. It is a matter of temperament, isn't it? I think that a man who develops early, and who marries the woman he loves when his powers are at their best, may be happy in politics and domestic life; but it is not so easy for a man who marries when he is young, who develops rapidly after marriage, and whose wife remains where she was when he married her. How often such a man must cry out for sympathy which his wife cannot give him! How often she must jar upon his nerves! How maddening it must be to feel that she lives completely outside the commotion of his soul! He can talk to her about the children's clothes and the greengrocer's bill; he can decide a matter about the governess; but where can he go when his heart is overcharged with its own suppression and he wants sympathy? Do you know what I do? Shall I tell you?"

"Well, I think not."

"But you are my friend; let me speak to you as a friend."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I would rather that you did not. I am very proud to be your friend; and it is because I wish to be your friend that I think one should not touch intimately, certainly not secretly, the very circumference of your domestic life."

"Oh, but I am only going to tell you a dream. I am not going to say anything unkind or disloyal. All I want to tell

you is this: I have a romance of the imagination. What do you think of that? I imagine that I am in love with a very beautiful woman. I get rid of all my suppressed emotions by constructing scenes and carrying on prolonged conversations with this woman of my dreams. The advantage is that she is always kind! One can live in this way very delightfully. But you have no idea how exciting it is, and how difficult. There are wonderful meetings. There are words, pressures of the hand, kisses—yes, forgive me, even kisses—which are beautiful beyond description.

“ ‘There was a rose without a thorn, and there
The treasure, and no serpent to beware.
Oh! think of such a mistress at your side
In such a solitude, and none to chide!’

In these moods—for love can only be a mood to one so busy as I—nothing in the whole world is so important as this exquisite woman who loves me profoundly, who understands me perfectly, and who knows how I suffer. And when the mood is over, I emerge like a giant refreshed—yes, really that is true. You have no idea what my harmless romance does for me. When I was a child I used to fall asleep telling myself stories in which I always figured heroically; I escaped in this way from the hardships and drudgery and commonplace of the practical world. It is the same now. I tell myself a love-story; it is my only escape from politics. And when my mood is over, I take up the burden of daily life with new strength. It is like a change of air, a change of scene; one has fed on honey-dew and drunk the milk of Paradise.”

She laughed in her gentle way, and looked straight ahead of her. “How amusing if this mood fell upon you in the midst of a speech, and you began raving about love! It is not impossible. Do you know what you are doing? You are hypnotising yourself. You are indulging in a prolonged

experiment in auto-suggestion. Be careful! If I were you, I should read a book when you feel that Hyde is giving way to Jekyll!"

He laughed. "How completely you live above the earth!" he exclaimed. "Read a book, say you! Dear lady, when a man is in love there is no book in the world that can distract his thoughts. He cannot even say his prayers. His whole mind is mastered by one insurgent obsession. The very ground under his feet has no existence."

Ruth Kingsford was very nearly a saint, a saint in the world of ideas; but she was human. She could not prevent herself from being interested in the heart of this impulsive man of action; she did not attempt to deceive herself as to the real nature of his romance; she liked to know that he cared for her. But she felt herself to be quite safe; and she knew that her influence on his political life was wholesome and good. She saw no reason why she should withdraw from this interesting friendship. Now and then she was aware of danger; particularly when she was with Phoebe. There were moments when she felt sorry for Maurice, when she understood that his domestic life could not be easy, and in these moments she told herself that perhaps their friendship was perilous. But their intimacy drifted on.

Phoebe had her father's dislike of Roman Catholics. She thought Ruth was very beautiful and charming, but she detected in her—perhaps it was the intuition of a wife who feels herself no longer loved—an element of slyness. She said to Maurice on one occasion: "Miss Kingsford is always watching. I feel that she never enters into anything. She does nothing in life but look on. What a pity she doesn't get married. I think a baby might make her more natural and friendly."

II

ON one of her weekly visits to Clapham, Phœbe had an interesting story for the ears of Aunt Mildred, who was winding gray wool on the back of a chair.

“After Maurice had spoken in the House of Commons yesterday,” Phœbe related, “he was standing in the Members’ Lobby talking to some friends, when he saw his mother and father crossing arm-in-arm to the doors on the other side. He was so surprised that he thought it must be a dream. He really couldn’t believe the evidence of his own eyes. But after a moment he recovered himself and went after them. And what do you think he discovered? Why, the two old dears had saved some money which he gave them years and years ago on purpose that they might hear him speak as a Cabinet Minister. Wasn’t it nice of them? But listen. Directly Maurice was made a Minister they went to their Pastor in the Chapel in Derby to arrange everything for them so that they might come in secret and not *humiliate* Maurice by their presence—that was their word. Just think of it! Maurice drove off at once with them to the temperance hotel where they were staying, collected their luggage, and brought them to our house. This morning he sent them with the children in a carriage to the Abbey and to the Tower; and this afternoon they are visiting the Zoölogical Gardens. Their pride and delight are unbounded. You really must come, Aunt Mildred, and meet them. The dearest old things in the world—he, very jocular and polite; she, critical, on the defensive, and veiling her enthusiasm behind a vigorous disapproval of things in general. Oh, so funny, she and he! The children can scarcely keep their faces at meals: you can imagine it. But we all love them and it is perfectly delightful

to see how overwhelmed they are by the grandeur of London and the greatness of their son."

Aunt Mildred came to the conclusion that here was an admirable opportunity for effecting that family reunion which was the dearest object of her life. She told the story of the two old Sangsters to her brother, told it very movingly, and suggested at the end of her narrative that it would be a pleasant and a kindly thing to ask them to dinner. "And if we ask Maurice too," she concluded, "I am sure he would most gladly come."

Old Champness replied that he saw no reason why the Sangsters should not be asked to dinner; but as for Maurice, well, he was under the impression that the Home Secretary was not very good at remembering old friends. In the end Aunt Mildred, with a very elated heart, found herself in the position for which she had maneuvered ever since she came to take Phœbe's place. A dinner-party was arranged, and so genially did old Champness warm towards this entertainment that, two days before it came off, he bade Aunt Mildred spare no expense to make the dinner a tip-top affair, saying that he would bring two or three friends of his own to fill the table.

When the evening arrived, all the lights on the ground floor of the Clapham home were turned full on, the hearth in the drawing-room was as clean as a new pin, and Aunt Mildred, in a long train, innumerable flounces, and a new cap, very cheerful but a little nervous, went to take a final view of the dining-room table five minutes before the guests were expected. It was really a spectacle.

We can imagine what was in her heart as she looked upon that beautiful creation of her hands. There was not a detail there but which had occupied her thoughts for many days. She had planned the miter-like designs of the napkins, she had chosen the shades for the candles, she had selected the flowers, she had arranged the silver; and

the little rolls from Mr. Carpenter, the famous confectioner on Clapham Common, the peaches, the grapes, the oranges, the apples, the almonds and raisins, the candied fruit in boxes, the chocolate creams in silver trays and the lordly pineapple at each end of the loaded and glistening table—all these things had been personally bought by Aunt Mildred with the pious idea of celebrating a family function, in which love and good-will were to triumph over misunderstanding and distrust.

The sound of feet on the gravel outside sent this happy and satisfied hostess hurrying to the drawing-room at the back of the house. You may be sure that she shut the dining-room door as she came out, so that no one might see her beautiful table till the rightful hour.

The guests who had disturbed her were Phœbe and the two old Sangsters—Mrs. Sangster senior bringing her cap in a large paper bag pinned across the top. Mr. Sangster, we may say, was dressed in a frock-coat of shining broadcloth, with very wide lapels, in one of which was a blue ribbon; his waistcoat came close up to the turned-down collar which encircled his thin neck; he wore a small black bow-tie; his elastic-side boots were new ones, and therefore they took a polish very badly, and creaked as he walked.

When Aunt Mildred had welcomed these guests, which she did warmly and engagingly, she carried off Mrs. Sangster and Phœbe, that they might put their bonnets off upstairs, bidding Mr. Sangster sit close to the fire and warm himself until they came down again.

But old Sangster was warm—very hot—from the soles of his squeezed feet in the new boots to the crown of his head, which he had washed and brushed very thoroughly before starting out. He was glowing—glowing with pride, with bewilderment, with apprehension. He walked to and fro in the big room, smiling loosely, muttering to himself,

blowing his nose like a trumpet with one of the three clean handkerchiefs, neatly folded in his tail-pockets, and fingering his cuffs, which continually came down to his knuckles. He was so happy that he could not sit still, so nervous that he had to rehearse again and again what he should say and how he should behave when the other guests arrived. The old gentleman, in short, was in a perfect fluster.

The door opened, and Leonard Champness entered the room.

His face had thinned and become pale; the old obstinacy had given place to a look of gentleness—the silly look, as his father had called it.

Old Sangster bowed low, and advanced to this stranger, washing his hands, smiling and muttering, his head first on this side and then on that, his cuffs all over his hands.

“I think,” said Leonard, “you must be Mr. Sangster, the father of my brother-in-law?”

“I am, sir,” replied Sangster.

They shook hands.

“Yes, sir, a humble and unworthy individual,” continued old Sangster, “but the father of the Right Honorable. God’s doing, sir, God’s doing. And you, sir, are the son of Mr. Humphry Champness? I am glad to meet you—proud, sir, proud. Your esteemed lady sister has spoken of you. A scholar, sir. Ah, I can see that for myself. Fond of books! no doubt about it. A great reader, a student, a scholar. Well, sir, we want scholars; we can’t get on without them; the more scholars we have the better. I hope, sir, I’m not running on too much. Old men are garrulous. Shakespeare noticed that, sir. Ah, a wonderful man; I hazard the assumption, sir, that he knew nearly everything there is to know. We shall never have another like him, sir. You agree to that? You think so, too? Ah, I’m glad to find myself in agreement with so great a scholar.”

At this point the ladies returned, and after a little general conversation, rendered extremely difficult by the monosyllabic answers of Mrs. Sangster, which she snapped out as if she were there under protest and wanted to bite everybody's nose off, old Sangster buttonholed Leonard, drew him aside, and asked furtive questions about his father. Not getting any satisfactory answers, however, to these elusive fishings, he concluded in this fashion:

"I remember him, sir. My memory is not a good one, but I remember your father; he was a prominent man in Derby, of course, but retiring, if I remember rightly—distinctly retiring. He won't remember me, of course, though we saw each other in chapel for a number of years—at a distance, you understand. Now, sir, would you, knowing him well, call your father a genial man—genial, sir? A gentleman easy to get on with in social converse—would you call him that, sir? Forgive me asking such a question; but, to make a confession, sir—don't let my wife hear me—I'm in a terrible fuss lest I should say anything to-night, or do anything, to disgrace the Right Honorable. I'm not used to company, sir. An old man. And sometimes when I run on, sir, I feel I say too much. Now, if your father is a genial man, sir . . ."

Leonard did his best to reassure the old gentleman, but in his heart he entertained considerable doubts as to the reception Mr. Sangster was likely to receive at his father's hands; there was, indeed, a general feeling of nervousness in the room. Aunt Mildred was trembling for the meeting between her brother and Maurice. Phoebe was distressed by the obdurate oppugnance of Mrs. Sangster's manner, and had her own misgivings, too, about Maurice and her father. As for Leonard, something had occurred that day to distress him very much. Father Prague had gone over to the Roman Church, and the evening newspapers, in the absence of other news, were rather full of this mat-

ter. Leonard had known for some days of his friend's intention, but the noise made by the announcement had filled him with unhappiness.

The door opened, and old Champness arrived, wearing his slippers as usual and carrying the evening newspaper in his hand. He looked cheerful—cheerful for Mr. Champness. Sangster made a rush at him, wrung his hand warmly, and beaming into his face, assured him of the gratitude felt by “self and wife” for the cordial invitation which had brought them there.

Mr. Champness said: “You had better reserve your thanks till you see what my sister gives us to eat,” and walked over to Mrs. Sangster, on the best sofa, who did her utmost to remain seated, but failed ignominiously at the last moment, and actually said, as she shook hands, “Pleased to meet you,” so terrible was the atmosphere of greatness and dignity carried about with him by old Champness.

“Your friends have not come with you then?” inquired Aunt Mildred, beginning to feel more hopeful.

“My friends?” he asked, fumbling for his eyeglasses.

“You were to bring three friends, I thought, from the City?”

Old Champness placed his eyeglasses on the end of his nose—he was standing on the hearth rug with his back to the fire—and replied, opening one of the newspapers: “They’ll be here directly, I expect.” Then, looking at Leonard over his eyeglasses, as Phoebe and Aunt Mildred glanced at each other, he said: “So your friend, Mr. Prague, has turned Papist, I see.”

“I see he has,” replied Leonard.

“Prague, sir, Prague?” inquired old Sangster. “Is that the clergyman we had at Derby? Father Prague they called him?”

“I always said,” announced Mrs. Sangster, straightening

her skirt, "that he was a Papist in disguise. Horrible man! teaching children about the Mass, as he called it; little children no bigger than your Humphry," she added, turning to Phoebe, and folding her hands complacently in her lap. "Dresses himself up like a regular guy! I've no patience with such deceivers."

"Well, ma'am," said Champness, "the country is full of such gentry."

"I'm afraid it is, sir," commented Sangster, shaking his head.

"The Church of England," continued Champness, "is a nursery for Rome; nothing more and nothing less. The clergy are going over in shoals. If they had their will they'd put us under the heel of the Pope to-morrow."

"I tell you what it is, sir," said old Sangster, scratching one of his wiry whiskers and speaking with great animation; "we want another Martin Luther, sir. That's what we want—another Martin Luther and another Cromwell. Big men, sir—big men! You can't fight Rome with small men, sir; you want giants. You want men who are not afraid to take their coats off. I hope I may live to see the day when the Right Honorable—my son, sir, Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Home Affairs—will take his coat off to Rome; I should like to hear him say, 'Thus far and no farther!' I feel, sir, that he could do it. A strong man, a fearless man, and honest—honest as the day!"

He was interrupted by the opening of the door, and the announcement by the servant of Mr. Girshel.

Phoebe started and glanced with apprehension at Aunt Mildred. Mrs. Sangster turned her spectacles, with challenge, to the door, and seeing Girshel, exclaimed: "Why, it's the very man!" with infinite disgust; but Girshel entered the room, smiling and well pleased. Champness and he now did business together; he had long sighed for a

reconciliation with Maurice through the financier. He was delighted by the invitation he had received, and now greeted old Champness with the manner of an intimate friendship, making his bow all round and whispering in Mrs. Sangster's ear, before she had time to smack his face, "Faithless one! you haven't got 'em on!" He was so friendly with Phœbe, too, that one might have thought that they had met on the previous day. Before the other guests had settled under this shock, the door opened, and in came old Gowler and Maud—old Gowler in a gray suit, and Maud in a violent mauve dress, very much frilled round the neck, and with her hair marvelously tired by a barber in the Westminster Bridge Road.

Champness shook hands with them, and presented them to his sister as "old friends, very old friends, of the Home Secretary," leaving her to continue the introductions while he returned to his newspaper, smiling sardonically.

Leonard looked at his father, and then went to Phœbe, saying something to ease her anxiety.

It must be explained that when old Champness heard from Phœbe the story of Maud Gowler at Lord Ravenstruther's—a story over which he chuckled heartily for many a long day—he sent Jiggins down to Lambeth, having got Gowler's address from Phœbe, to find out the condition of the family. The report of Jiggins led Champness to send for Gowler. Gowler was in work, but times were bad; Champness helped him and kept an eye on him. It must not be thought that he spied into Maurice's past, or that he was in any way disposed to credit the absurd delusion of Maud that Maurice had once been in love with her; he had only one purpose in his charity—to save up the Gowlers for the possible day when he might exhibit as a humbug and a snob the man who had once called him a Pharisee.

The drawing-room was now in a condition of nervous

excitement bordering on collapse. Mrs. Sangster was furious with Girshel and could hardly be kept still. Phœbe was nearly as furious with Maud Gowler, whose airs were insufferable, and whose drawling voice made her feel quite ill. Leonard and Aunt Mildred, who now perceived that the dinner-party was evidently planned only to witness the discomfiture of Maurice, were in a state of indignant anxiety; and Girshel, who imagined that he had been asked by Mr. Champness in order to make it up with Maurice, felt himself insulted by the presence of such people as the Gowlers, and suspected a trap. Only old Sangster was happy, in the realization that Mr. Gowler was a man of his own standing. The relief afforded to his feelings by Gowler's gray suit and grubby hands and beery countenance was really prodigious.

Into this room, charged with so many conflicting emotions, entered, last of all, and on the very stroke of seven o'clock, Maurice Sangster, the Home Secretary, fresh from the House of Commons.

He entered the room with the eagerness and bustling alacrity of a man of affairs. He was conscious of his greatness, proud to return to this familiar house as a chief and honored guest, and he had the satisfactory feeling that he could afford to be generous. The first person he saw was old Champness himself, standing on the hearth rug facing the door, one newspaper under his left arm and another hanging to the floor from his right hand, his eyeglasses at the end of his blunt nose.

Maurice thought to himself, "How old he has got! but he will last for years, all the same."

Champness thought to himself, "As great a rogue as ever!"

They shook hands as if nothing had happened, and Champness thought that in the firm grip and warm pressure of Maurice's hand there was meant to be something in the

nature of an apology, but something also in the nature of forgiveness. "I think you know everybody here," he said; "no need to introduce you. A party of old friends who have not forgotten you."

Maurice turned round to greet Aunt Mildred, and came face to face with Girshel.

"Delighted to renew our friendship," said the Jew, smiling amiably. "Delighted and proud." Then, in Maurice's ear, "Bygones are bygones, dear boy!"

But Maurice, seeing the Jew, saw at the same time Maud Gowler. His face paled for a moment; he, too, felt himself trapped. A wave of furious anger surged over his heart. He had to put severe restraint upon himself to be civil; it was really touch and go with him whether he should turn on his heel and go out of the room. He mumbled a few words to Girshel and then, going to Maud, offered his hand, saying: "Well, Miss Gowler, this is an unexpected pleasure. How is your father?"

"He's here to speak for himself," said Maud. "So you've shaved yourself again; I knew you had by the pictures in the papers, but I'm glad to see it for myself. That beard of yours was horrid!" She turned to Phœbe, congratulating her on having induced Mr. Sangster to shave off the obnoxious beard.

"Why, Mr. Gowler," exclaimed Maurice, full of good-humor, "what a surprise this is! Not changed a bit; younger if anything." And then, turning to old Champness, "I suppose you know, sir, that you've got here one of the most convinced and unalterable Conservatives in the country?" He laughed, and turned to greet his mother, whom he kissed on both cheeks.

"I'm glad to know there is someone here," said Champness, "who doesn't change."

Old Sangster went to Champness and whispered in his ear: "Not spoilt by his greatness! A splendid man, sir!"

You'll forgive me, sir, but I'm proud of him. Such a spirit, and yet simple as a child!"

"No doubt he is," rejoined old Champness.

The dinner, let us say at once, was saved by Maurice and by nobody else. Aunt Mildred thanked him afterwards, and expressed her deep regret at what she called her brother's bad joke. Maurice was certainly admirable. Champness directed the guests at the table, and so arranged this disposition that Maurice had Maud Gowler at his side, and Girshel opposite. In spite of this disconcerting arrangement, however, Maurice rattled away in the most cheerful manner possible. He called it a dinner of old friends under happier auspices, and laughed and smiled and jested till Girshel really felt that he loved the man. He said it was a capital idea of his father-in-law to ask people whom he had known in his early days and whom he had never forgotten. He recalled, with Maud Gowler, the memories of Lambeth, and told amusing stories to the table of his economies in those days. He chaffed Girshel across the table about politics, he made Gowler utter the most ultramontane opinions on social questions, and all the way through dinner he addressed old Champness with a very placating but quite manly respect. Aunt Mildred, at the other end of the splendid table, felt that he was a veritable hero.

Phoebe wished that he was more often like this in his own home.

As for Champness, who plowed slowly through his great dinner and only occasionally uttered some mordant remark, he thought that Maurice had improved in one direction and deteriorated in another. "He's no longer a prig," he concluded, "but he's also no longer a Christian. He's a man of the world, through and through, over the ankles, and up to the neck." This conviction forced itself more and more upon the old man and made him angry.

It was not until the ladies had withdrawn, after a superb ice, which Aunt Mildred had kept as the culminating surprise of her fine dinner, that conversation became serious—really serious; and the seriousness turned not upon politics, but upon religion.

Maurice, lighting a cigarette, turned to Leonard, who was now sitting beside him, and said: "So Prague has gone over? I was afraid of it."

At this Champness unloosed. "I'm told," he said, "that Nonconformity has had its day. Wherever I go I am told that Nonconformity cannot keep its young men. Pastors are adopting all kinds of new methods to try and keep the young men, but the effort fails. Nonconformity is dead. The old people are dying off; the young people are drifting away. If this is so, what stands between the country and its conquest by Rome?"

There was silence for a moment. Then Maurice answered, knocking the ash off his cigarette, leaning forward to do this and frowning down at the plate in front of him: "I quite agree that the situation is serious; but I think it is serious in another way. Nonconformity is losing its young men, but not to Rome. The Church of England is losing a few of its clergy to Rome, but not its laity; its laity is declining in numbers, but the defection is not to Rome. The real loss of all the churches is, in fact, the gain of infidelity. Indifference carries them out, not antagonism; that is the seriousness of the situation."

"That's very true—very true indeed," said his father, shaking his head. He had listened to Maurice from the other side of the table, leaning forward, with a hand behind his ear, so as not to lose a single word.

Old Gowler said: "You can't expect people to believe what is in the Bible; it's against reason."

This highly explosive remark was ignored by everybody,

except Girshel, who winked, as much as to say, "Wait till I start on them!"

"I don't believe in infidelity," said old Champness; "man is by nature religious. Infidelity is only a phase; it will pass, and when it has passed, you will find that this country is under Rome."

"I don't agree with you, Mr. Champness," said Girshel, taking his cigar from his lips. "I'm sorry to cross you; but I don't believe that what you say is true. Look now, if there is one religious people in the world, it is my people. And what do we find to-day? Why, it's the same with us as with you Christians: the young people are breaking away. Why? Because this is an age of science and enlightenment. Religion belongs to the dark ages; it's superstition. It laid its hold on the human species before reason had properly developed its little cell under the human skull. As soon as ever reason began to assert itself, religion dropped back; it has been dropping back ever since. Presently it will drop off altogether, like the monkey's tail. The priests have taken the sword and the torch against reason, they have had kings and Governments on their side, everything in this world has been on their side; but they've failed. Freedom has triumphed; and Freedom is atheism."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed old Sangster.

"That's right," said Gowler, nodding his head—he was smoking a cigar and making the end very spongy and dragged—"and I never heard it put better nor conciser. Reason's the winner. Hands down."

"I'm sorry to hear such sentiments at my table," said old Champness very solemnly.

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Sangster. "Hear, hear, indeed, sir!"

"We live in a free country," cautioned old Champness—"a freedom won and maintained by Protestants: every man

is entitled to his opinions and his right to express them. . . .”

“That’s so!” said the approving Sangster.

“But,” said Champness, “there are some opinions which ought not to be expressed at a gentleman’s table; and of those opinions, atheistical opinions are the chief and the most shameful.”

“No man is an atheist,” Maurice put in. He looked straight at Girshel. “You aren’t really an atheist,” he said. “You think you are; but you’re like the rest, only an agnostic—that is to say, one who has shelved a question he is too indolent or too much occupied to decide.”

“You’re wrong, Mr. Home Secretary!” cried old Gowler. “I know hundreds of atheists. I’m one. I’ve thought it out. I can prove to any reasonable man that——”

“Oh, hush, hush!” cried old Sangster. “Upon my soul! Good heavens! what have I lived to hear!”

“I think, perhaps, we had better change the conversation,” said Champness.

“Forgive me,” laughed Girshel, “but I find that is what religious people always suggest directly they meet with opposition.”

“We were speaking not of the general question of religion,” said old Champness; “that is a matter both unfitted for a dinner-table and impossible of solution in the course of conversation. We were speaking of churches, and of Rome in particular, and a question which men can discuss within reasonable bounds. In some ways we may call it a ‘political question.’”

“Rome is dead!” exclaimed Girshel, cigar in mouth—
“dead as a cat!”

“I differ from you. I should say she was very much alive,” replied Champness.

“Her power is certainly dwindling on the Continent,” said Maurice.

"But not in this country," rejoined Champness.

"Perhaps not."

Old Champness looked at his son. "What is your feeling," he demanded, "about Mr. Prague's perversion?"

Leonard, to whom this discussion was odious in the extreme, looked up slowly, regarded his father for a moment, and replied: "I should say he would have a very good influence on his new communion." Then he lowered his eyes again.

"What does that mean?" asked old Champness, full of fight, looking round the table, the color rising to his cheeks.

"Mr. Gladstone said," put in Maurice quietly, "that whenever he heard of a good Anglican going over to Rome, his one consolation was the hope that the defection might lead eventually to the reformation of the Roman Church."

"Fudge!" cried old Champness. "Fudge! I'm sorry to hear that Mr. Gladstone ever talked such nonsense! Rome never changes."

"No," laughed Girshel; "she rots!"

"She's done," declared Gowler. "Gone to pot long ago. Not a kick left in her. You ought to go in the Park on a Sunday afternoon!"

"Rome will remain as she is," said old Champness, "till the end of the world; she is the unchangeable Antichrist. No," he said, looking at Leonard, "you may put out of your head any notion that Mr. Prague will alter the Vatican. The Vatican has got him, as it may very possibly get you, and neither you nor Mr. Prague will change a comma in its blasphemies." He stopped for a moment, having fired this great shot, and then exclaimed: "What was the triumph of Protestantism? It was the triumph of the Teuton races over the power of the priest. The common sense and the freedom-loving qualities of the Teuton races threw off the pretensions of that tyrannous priestcraft, and set the written Word of God in supreme authority over each man's

individual soul; but ever since that day—that day which brought freedom to humanity—there have been traitors in the free churches, plotting and scheming for the return of priestcraft. As sure as I'm a living man, Rome will return to England—return in triumph, and on the back of the false priest; and then liberty will perish. Why do I think so? Do you ask me that! Well, I will tell you. Because there is a tolerance abroad which is fatal to Protestantism. Protestantism can only live while it is a fighting force. Take the fight out of Protestantism, make your Protestantism conciliatory, and the only living Protestantism, which is Rome's insuperable barrier to tyranny, ceases to exist. Look at yourself, look at Mr. Maurice Sangster, both of you are friends of this traitor, Prague. Why, my father would not have had him in the house, and if he appeared at my door I would fling him into the street!" The old man was tremendously roused.

There was a long silence after this hot-tempered speech. At last Maurice raised his head and inquired: "But surely, sir, you don't really mean that we are to turn our backs on a man because he is a Catholic?"

"No, I don't mean anything so foolish," said old Champness; "but I mean that no honest Protestant ought to make a friend of a man obviously and openly plotting to hand over this country to the mercies of Rome. That kind of intimacy is nothing more and nothing less than treachery. It's the work of traitors."

Girshel laughed. "How these Christians love one another!" he exclaimed. "Well, really, I think it is time that *I* suggested a change of conversation. Let's talk about politics. We've got the Home Secretary here. Could we have a better opportunity for learning State secrets? Come, sir, let's talk politics," he concluded, turning to Champness and touching his arm.

But Champness said, without turning to Girshel, and

looking at old Sangster, who became very excited in consequence: "I mentioned this subject because I think it is time for a man like my son to cut himself adrift from these corrupting Anglicans, and time for a man like your son to speak out in public and tell the country of its peril. I am a patient man; I don't wish to exert any undue influence. I have no wish to drive any man against his will; but it is as well, perhaps, that my decision should be known. I don't want my children to say they were not warned. Not a shilling of my money goes to anyone who is not an honest, outspoken, and decided Nonconformist. Now," he concluded, rising from the table, "we will join the ladies."

At the door, which he opened, the old man stopped and put a hand on Maurice's arm, looking at him very closely. "Come, now," he said, in a rather agreeable way, "you're a Nonconformist, aren't you?"

"Certainly," said Maurice, surprised by this continuance of a disturbing topic.

"Well, now tell us; it will be interesting. You occupy a prominent position in the social and political world; you represent Nonconformity, where it is not often represented. Now, tell us: *when did you last go to chapel?*"

The question came like a pistol shot.

Old Sangster, who had pressed closely up to Mr. Champness directly he began to address Maurice, now turned to his son. "Well, that's easily answered. Last Sunday night, I should say."

"Wait a moment," said old Champness. "Now, did you," he asked Maurice, "go to chapel last Sunday?"

Maurice wondered whether Phoebe had been speaking about his habits. "No," he said, "I did not. I was too busy, I regret to say."

"Or the Sunday before?"

"No, nor the Sunday before."

“And the Sunday before that?”

Leonard walked out of the room, passing between the group and the wall, with disapproval and disgust marked visibly on his face.

“I really forget,” answered Maurice, his eyes kindling.

“My son! my son!” exclaimed old Sangster. “And yet, sir,” turning to Champness, “we must remember that a Cabinet Minister . . .”

Girshel and Gowler were laughing together. “You never saw a more praying fellow in your life,” said Gowler, “when I first knew him. Why, he was always asking a blessing and flopping down in our kitchen, showing the whites of his eyes. Pray! Why, he’d pray till he was hoarse!”

Champness said: “Cabinet Ministers have more need to go to chapel than anybody else, Mr. Sangster. Not in that spirit did the great founders of the free churches regard the Sabbath day. I am not a narrow man, I am not intolerant; but I tell you, this spirit of contempt for our religious customs is eating into the vitals of the nation. I’ll say no more. I was only anxious to know what so famous and distinguished a representative of Nonconformity as your son did with his Sundays. You and I, Mr. Sangster,” he said, taking his arm and leading him out of the room, “are two very old-fashioned men; we belong to the past. The future of our country belongs to Nonconformists who don’t go to chapel and ritualists in the Established Church who do go to Rome.”

Girshel, following up behind, nudged Maurice in the ribs, made a wry face, winked his eye, and whispered: “Cut off with a shilling, dear boy!”

Old Gowler, who was holding the tattered and spongy end of his cigar between the thick fingers of his discolored hand, with the lighted end turned inwards to the palm, said to Girshel, hiccoughing as he did so, for he had eaten

enormously and had drunk many tumblers of lemonade, a new drink which disagreed with him: "I'd take on anybody here—anybody, and lay 'em out flat. Why, they don't know nothing. They're talking in the air. Religion! What is it? Why, a blooming fairy tale."

They found Maud Gowler holding forth in the drawing-room with great eloquence on the ways of aristocracy.

III

THREE weeks after the unhappy dinner-party in Clapham, Maurice Sangster learned from Leonard Champness that the Kingsfords were going to Cap Martin for the winter. By a very odd coincidence Maurice consulted his doctor on the following day, and was advised to spend the winter in the South of France. Although Phœbe was inclined to regard the arrangement as "rather peculiar," it was really quite natural that Sir Edward and Lady Kingsford should ask Maurice to join their party when they learned that he was under medical orders to winter abroad.

The truth is, Maurice was thoroughly run down. The Liberal Party had been in a bad way for several months, and the work of persuading a slightly incredulous country to believe that the Government was seriously attempting to usher in Millennium fell almost entirely upon Maurice. After a hard-fought and perilous session, he had visited some of the principal manufacturing towns, delivering what are called "fighting speeches," and a fighting speech differs from other speeches only in this respect, that it generally takes more out of the fighter than the party it is meant to annihilate. Certain it is that Maurice felt exhausted, and as it was highly important that he should be

at his very best in the next session—when this much-threatened Government, driven to it by the temperance party, were going to draw swords against the brewing interest—everybody agreed that a winter abroad would be the best possible stimulant for the jaded Minister.

So Maurice went to Cap Martin with the Kingsfords, and spent two of the very happiest months of his life away from Phoebe and the children. He responded to the warm sun and the sea air; he was exhilarated by long tramps into the mountains; he loved the fine scenery; he went early to bed every night; and he read books given to him by Ruth Kingsford which were good for him to read.

It was decided on the journey out that Maurice certainly ought to know French, and Ruth undertook to give him lessons. They would go to the rocks nearly every afternoon, and sit there with the noise of the waves in their ears, the salt dust of the sea blowing in their faces, and carry out their serious undertaking. Nor did Maurice ever seek to interrupt the lesson with more intimate conversation. He was in earnest; he wanted to know French, and he found the learning of it a pleasant and stimulating recreation.

Indeed, it may be said at once that although Maurice had a very great admiration for Ruth Kingsford, only on one single occasion during these two months of close companionship, and then but momentarily, did he ever show the least sign of deeper feeling. Set free from the sordid and trivial vexations of party politics, breathing no longer the horribly unhealthy atmosphere of the House of Commons, and delivered from the necessity of composing endless speeches full of trumpets and battle-axes, the young Minister recovered something of the fervorous freshness of his youth, and honestly longed to be of real service to the human race.

He said to Ruth one day, as they came back from their

French lesson: "What do you think of me?—I am longing to be back."

"Before your accent is perfect?" she inquired, smiling to herself.

"Before I am too old to win my game."

"What is your game—tell me?"

"To become Prime Minister. You know what people say—that I shall certainly be Prime Minister after —— and after —— . But I want to be the next Prime Minister, and as soon as possible. There, I have told you my secret. Do you believe in a pure ambition?"

"In politics?"

"Yes; in politics."

"I'm not sure."

"Well, I've questioned myself a hundred times, particularly since I came here, and I believe my ambition is pure. I'll give you my reason. Do you know why I want to be the next Prime Minister? Because I fear the world, because I fear the House of Commons, because I fear middle-age. These three things may make me dishonest; they may corrupt my ambition. Do you see what I mean? A man grows blasé, and cynical, and fagged in the House of Commons. As he grows older he loses touch with democracy, and becomes more and more the complacent slave of the party machine. He thinks of himself; he forgets the people are hungry. He considers the interests of his party; he forgets that his fellow-creatures are housed worse than dogs. He goes about the country getting excited about structural alterations, and all the time the flesh and blood of human beings suffer hideously. What rot, what rot it is! all this bother about education, disestablishment, and licensing. You'd think by the noise we made that our measures were going to revolutionize life. They won't make a single human creature happier—not a single human creature. Session after session, year after year,

Parliament after Parliament—and the result—Words! What I want to do is to pull down a third of England, and build it up again. Housing—that's the center of the position. Good houses for the poor; plenty of room, plenty of air, and spaces everywhere for the children to play. And after that wages. Those are the two first steps towards a democratic state. A decent house and a living wage! How does that sound to you for a battle-cry? Do you wonder I want to go home?"

She asked him why he feared the House of Commons, the world, and middle-age. He told her of the social influences at work in politics, of the nervous exhaustion produced by the atmosphere of the House of Commons, and of the skepticism which befalls men in middle-age as to heroic remedies for the ills of humanity.

"But," she said, "you ought to have something in your soul powerful enough to protect you against these diseases."

"You mean religion? Why, some of the most cynical and narrow and embittered men in the House of Commons are Roman Catholics, High Churchmen, and Nonconformists. I assure you the business of party politics is a very destructive one; a man cannot keep the freshness and purity of his motives in an atmosphere that is charged with trickery, tactics, and self-seeking. All last session I was as bad as anyone. It is only now, looking back from these happy days, that I see my position in its true light. What was I working for? Shall I tell you? To keep my party in power! On my honor, that is true. It absorbed me. I felt it was the work of the universe! *To keep my party in power!* Think of the speeches I made, the people I saw, the hours I slaved—simply to keep my party in power."

"And now?"

"And now! Why, I am strong enough to say, Damn

my party! I'm ready to take risks. I'm bold enough to trust democracy. I believe in the possibility of reform."

There were days when he told her about the life of people who toil for a starving dole in the slums of our congested cities; and she was greatly moved, and drew nearer to him, and desired with all her heart that he should conquer in his battle against the Whigs. She became ashamed of her own Church, and grew to see that the poor had been frightfully neglected.

"The priests," she said to him one day, "are the Whigs of politics. They ought to be Radicals like you—every one of them." This was after a peregrination of the slums in Mentone. Maurice discovered that in the Roman Catholic Church there are almost as many divisions of opinion as distract the Protestant churches. He came to learn that Ruth Kingsford, who was becoming more Radical every day, did not believe in many of the dogmas which he had always held to be the very foundations of Rome. When he spoke of these dogmas, she gave him the mystics' interpretation of them, and taught him to see that there is an evolution in dogma as in everything else. "We do not believe word for word what our forefathers believed," she said to him: "but we believe in the spirit which they endeavored to express by words, and in something higher than they were able to glimpse."

He went with the Kingsfords on one occasion to Mass. There were several matters in the ritual which troubled him, angered him, irritated him. He said to himself: "What cheats these priests are, mumbling their old Latin, and making mysterious signs, like the magic-workers of heathen times!" But in the afternoon of that day, talking to Ruth of these things, he discovered that they all had their roots in an ancient and reverent tradition, that they all symbolized something which he had to acknowledge was beautiful, and that they had no other meaning in their use

than to stimulate the imagination of the people and to increase their sense of reverence. There are books, he learned, which teach the people the meaning of this ritual; they are not cheated or kept in the dark of the mystery. For instance, he observed that when the priest elevated the Host, the kneeling servers lifted the chasuble of the priest. Why did they do that? What good did it do? What purpose was served by it?

Ruth told him that in the great churches the chasuble is so heavy with lace and jewels that the priest really cannot raise his arms easily; but the custom is maintained in simpler churches because it symbolizes the essential priesthood of the laity—"the server," she said, "in lifting the chasuble, symbolizes to the congregation that they, too, are elevating the Host. It is an act which associates the laity with the altar."

He came to see, in fact, that most of the customs in the Roman ritual help the worshipers and include the worshipers. He could not deny to himself, and he did not deny to Ruth, that he now saw force and beauty in the Roman Mass.

She said to him: "Think what it is for us to feel that our Eucharist is *catholic*—that while we pray and worship, all over the world men and women of every nation are praying and worshiping in exactly the same words, and with exactly the same ritual! For centuries, from the very dawn of Christendom, our worship has ascended to Heaven. Don't you agree that this thought is a help?"

"But the words don't ascend—the ritual doesn't ascend—only the spirit."

"But we say that the words and the ritual have been decreed by which the spirit can most fitly ascend. How long have they endured! You will find them in the Greek Church and the Anglican Church. Your brother-in-law is a Catholic. It is only Nonconformists who have really

broken the tradition. You are outside the Catholic Church, but your brother-in-law is a Catholic."

"What! Don't you regard Leonard as a heretic?"

"Nonsense! He is a very good Catholic."

"You are broader-minded than most Catholics, then!"

"Look!" she said, and pointed ahead.

Two old peasants, a man and his wife, had come to a Calvary in the road; the man took off his cap, and stood before the Crucifix with his head bowed; the woman advanced to the stone steps, put down her basket before her, and kneeled on the lowest step, clasping her hands and looking upward.

"Don't you think it would be better for England," she asked, "if you could see such a spectacle as that in Birmingham or in Manchester?"

"It reminds me," he said, "I don't know why, of something I saw not long ago in London—something that has haunted me ever since. It was quite a different thing, but those old peasants give me exactly the same feeling—a feeling half of pain and half of pity."

"What was it—tell me?"

"It is not easy to tell."

The old peasants continued their way, and as they passed Ruth and Maurice, the man doffed his hat, the woman smiled, and they uttered a gentle blessing—all very cheering and dignified.

Ruth stood before the Calvary for a moment, and then, crossing herself, kneeled for a moment on the lowest step. Maurice uncovered.

"Those old people," she said, coming back to him, "have made this holy ground. Tell me, now, what was it you saw in London?"

"Well," he replied, "when my father and mother were staying with us, I took them one day to a place of amusement—I really forget where—and it was while we were

walking home that the thing occurred. I had left them to go into a shop, and they continued their way, my father stooping down to give his arm to my mother, who was always rather alarmed by the crowded streets, and suspected everybody of being a pickpocket. You can picture them going along, can't you? Two very obviously country people, old-fashioned, and a little grotesque, no doubt, to the cockney; and my mother certainly old, and as certainly not beautiful. Well, just as I came up behind them, they were passing one of those poor, wretched women of the street, garishly dressed, rouged, and all the rest of it—a rather pretty and a fairly young person, standing with her back to a shop-window—waiting. I expected to see her laugh or sneer. But my mother had apparently just uttered some querulous remark, for my father stooped down to her, and I heard him say: 'It will be all right, my love, don't you fear, dear, don't you fear; I'll take care of you.' And do you know that a look of positive agony passed over the girl's face, a sudden spasm of pain, and she turned and looked after them wistfully. It seemed to me she was thinking of her own old age. How very ugly my mother must have seemed to her—but how greatly loved! How very ungenial and complaining, but how tenderly cared for! And she, young, pretty, engaging!—standing there, waiting, waiting, waiting, with no one to show her a kindness. Her face—the pain of it! My God! it was like a knife through my heart. I walked behind the old people for five minutes, trying to hide them, avoiding at least making myself a further evidence of the love which surrounded my poor old mother. I shall never forget what I felt."

"Those women," said Ruth, "are to be pitied, but they are the worst enemies of God and society."

Maurice was surprised by the judgment in her voice. The subject was too indelicate, but he wanted to say: "Have I found you out, then, in one intolerance?" He

was disappointed at the reception of his story, and disappointed to find that Ruth could be hard.

"You can imagine what such women mean to us, who are Catholics, and who exalt and worship the Blessed Virgin," she said slowly.

"But such a woman found pity at the hands of Him Who——"

"Oh, we pity them. We don't judge them individually. And the woman who was not stoned—was she really one of an organized trade? Do you know that our Church, which is so earnest about the purity of women, is very pitiful to one who sins because she loves? That is a different thing. I can imagine a good woman, a perfectly true Catholic, falling into sin through love. And the Church would forgive her; she has to confess her sin and to repent, but forgiveness is freely and tenderly given to her. But those others—— No; they are horrible."

Before Maurice could make any reply, she asked him: "But what made you think of that scene?—what connected it with the Calvary?"

"I can't tell you," he said. "Perhaps I felt that those peasants were very much happier in their superstitions than I with my more rational religion—forgive the self-esteem. I quite frankly confess that a man who stands where I stand now is not so happy as the people who stand where my father and mother stand, or where those two old peasants stood."

"They knelt!" she said, smiling.

"Ah, there's something in life, some stream of tendency, that carries us away, not exactly against our wills, but in spite of ourselves, towards a future that shows no harbor. I know my father is a happier man than I am; yet I would rather be dead than live such a life as his. I know that my life of struggle and contention is full of disillusion; I know very well that it affords no real rest, promises no

enduring peace—yet I must live it, yet I long to get back to it. Something has spoiled me for a life of pleasant ease.”

“I suppose if you became a Catholic it would interfere with your ambition?”

“Oh, but I have no thought of becoming a Catholic.”

“What a pity! I am sure the discipline would give you just that sense of peace, that feeling of real background, which your life lacks at present.”

“What you have done for me,” he replied, “is to broaden my mind, to make my sympathies more catholic; you have taken away a great wall of my prejudice, and let more sunlight and fresh air into my soul. But I belong now to no Church—at least, I like to think I belong to the only true Church! You know what I mean?”

It was necessary for him to return sooner than he expected. A telegram came from Ravenstruther urging him, if possible, to travel by the next train. He put off his departure, however, till the night express, and gave himself up for that day to the enjoyment of Ruth's society. Sir Edward and Lady Kingsford had gone to Mentone when the telegram arrived. Ruth was alone in the garden of the hotel, sitting in a deck-chair, and writing letters on her lap. When she heard the news, a shadow passed across her eyes, nor did she attempt to conceal her regret.

“But you were to spend three days with us in Paris!” she exclaimed; “and your French is only just beginning to interest you! What a pity; oh, what a pity! I am more sorry than I can tell you.”

The frankness of this regret made him very happy. He said to her: “Leave a message for your people, and let us go up for the last time into the hills.”

She put away her papers, and rose from the chair, giving him the portfolio to carry. “I suppose you are

delighted," she said, putting up her sunshade, "to be going back to the excitement and the battle."

"I should be happier if you were coming back too!"

"Well, we shall only be nine or ten days behind you; and perhaps you will soon find me fighting on the Radical side."

"Do you know," he said to her, stopping and looking into her eyes as he faced towards her, "that these have been the very happiest days in my whole life?"

"I am so glad," she said with energy, quite frankly and joyfully.

"And from this," he said, with a sudden access of emotion, "I go back to the hustings and to—Kensington!"

They looked at each other for a full moment without speaking. Then Ruth turned and walked towards the hotel. They did not utter a word all the way, nor when she turned in the hall to take her portfolio did she even thank him.

He sat and waited for her. His heart was beating fast; he was conscious of great pain and great excitement; he knew that he loved her more than anyone in the world, more than his career, more than the topmost summit of his ambition; and he knew that he had told her; and he thought that she had answered him.

He waited and waited.

It became impossible for him to sit still. He walked to and fro in the lounge, trying to think, trying to realize what had happened to him.

Someone was approaching him from behind. He turned quickly, thinking it was Ruth, and came face to face with her maid.

He was told that Miss Kingsford was sorry, but she did not think she could go for a walk. She was feeling the sun, and would lie down till luncheon.

When he met her at luncheon she was quite natural and happy; nor did she seek to avoid him afterwards. They

parted as very good friends between whom there was nothing hidden or critical. The Kingsfords went to see him off at the station, and the farewells lacked nothing in cheerful good-humor.

IV

RAVENSTRUTHER explained the situation in a few picturesque words. "We are in the devil's own mess," he said. "In fact, we are between the Scylla of temperance fanaticism and the Charybdis of Bung's millions—what? Unless we do something more for the temperance Johnnies we shall be beaten in the House of Commons; and if we do anything more for the temperance Johnnies, Bung will beat us in the country. There you are, my dear fellow. That's the situation—what?"

The Prime Minister, it appeared, wanted Maurice to square the temperance party, to soften the asperities of the Government measure, and to make a few speeches in the country which would keep the party together for the sake of the wonderful measure of social reform which is always to come when the present useless but tactical Bill is out of the way.

Maurice said to Ravenstruther: "As it stood, this Bill would scarcely touch the drink question; as it stands now, it won't touch it at all."

Ravenstruther, whose father was very ill just then, and who was, therefore, conscious that he might be sitting in the House of Lords before the next session had come to an end, nodded his head very wisely, inserted his fingers into his waistcoat pockets and looked down at his patent-leather boots, working his feet inside them.

"I know, my dear fellow," he replied thoughtfully, "I know. You're perfectly right. The whole thing is a

monstrous mistake—what?” He looked up. “But what are we to do? We’ve got Bung confronting us in a state of cash-payment indignation; and we’ve got the temperance crowd shoving at our backs with a cudgel in their strong right hand. *Que voulez-vous?*”

“Why don’t we abandon the farce,” demanded Maurice, “and go in for something real, like housing?”

“Housing! The land! My dear fellow, you can’t be serious!” Ravenstruther laughed.

“But I am. I’m quite serious,” Maurice replied.

“What! Do you mean to say—— Oh, but the idea is absurd. You’ve been gambling at Monte Carlo! This’ll never do. Good Lord!—what?”

“I’m serious; I mean it.”

“You try and move the Cabinet!” laughed Ravenstruther. “Why, my dear Sangster, the land interest is ten times as strong as the brewers. We should lose our majority in a week—what? And if we had a majority of a hundred, the Lords would throw us out. The land! No, that’s a question for the Mellennium. It’s not practical politics.”

“We’re only fiddling at present,” replied Sangster. “We can’t live on that. We’ve got to do something. Besides—— You threaten me with the Lords. But what would happen if I threatened the Lords with the people? Has that occurred to you?”

“Nothing would please me better, nothing in the world. But I don’t see the people rising just yet to overthrow the Lords. My dear fellow——”

But Sangster cut him short. “You want me to deceive the people with this Licensing Bill. You think that is easy. I’m inclined to think it would be easier to get the people at our back with something rather more honest. I’m going to see the Prime Minister. I’m sick of shuffling. I want something done, *something real!*”

In language more statesmanlike and reasonable the Prime Minister made a very similar reply to Ravenstruther's when Maurice suggested a Land Bill. Maurice left him with the unhappy vista before his eyes of a Licensing Bill, an Education Bill, a Welsh Disestablishment Bill, a Home Rule Bill, while real reform—real reform touching the lives of the people—was invisible even on a very vague and infinitely distant horizon.

He was bitterly disappointed. It may be that the sudden change to London had something to do with it, or it may be that this political disappointment was also responsible, but certainly Maurice was in a very bad temper for a number of weeks, much to the unhappiness of Phoebe.

But he went into the provinces and made three great vigorous speeches on the drink question, which really revived the hopes of his party. He returned to London just before the assembling of Parliament in a pretty good conceit with himself. Wherever he went leaders of the party said to him, "When you're Prime Minister, we shall get things done," and while he was in the provinces Maurice had felt that he was nearing his goal. But something happened soon after his return to London which dashed these hopes to the ground.

The Liberal Party, at that time, had to give an impression to the world of greater cheerfulness than really inspired it. Although everybody knew that the Government could only get through the next session by a miracle, and although some of the opposition newspapers were already amusing themselves with forecasts of the next Conservative Cabinet, the Liberals decided that they would pull up all the blinds, light a great many candles, set a number of fiddlers to work, and assure mankind that they never had felt so happy and victorious in their lives.

Which means that the Session opened with very much more social gayety than usual—all the great Whig ladies

flinging their doors wide to the proletariat, putting on their finest diamonds, ordering an immense number of singularly expensive robes, and setting their cooks to work as if all the hungry people in London were to be adequately fed at last.

The Tory ladies replied to this challenge. Hangers-on of this aristocratic party found themselves going from earl's house to duke's house, and from duke's house to marquis's house, meeting archbishops, ambassadors, judges, and millionaires wherever they went; rubbing shoulders with those honorable patricians who represent the Old Guard of English aristocracy; and eating, drinking, and talking with men and women of the greatest power and the most impressive charm, from morning to night.

It was a duel of fashionable women. The two great parties in the State, who appear on the hustings as the obedient servants of democracy, were now fighting with the gloves off in the privacy of their own domain. Beautiful duchesses bared their exquisite shoulders in this contest, and countesses of the strictest and most rigid sect smiled amiably upon the smallest parvenu who could help their party. Every day the newspapers were full of these contending receptions—columns of great names, columns of uniforms and dresses, columns describing the floral decorations, the courses, and the wines, and the orchestras. The tradesmen rubbed their hands with delight; the theatrical agents were at their wits' end to supply both parties; and fashionable mothers with marriageable daughters felt that the heavens were positively raining husbands. But the poor, the wretched, and the starving were not a penny the better off for all this vast expenditure of money.

Now, it was at a great reception given by the Prime Minister that Maurice received the shock which dashed his hopes to the ground. He was there in his Windsor uniform, looking extremely romantic, and feeling himself

somewhat elated by the greetings he received, when he heard one great lady say to another—both of them very fat and nearly naked—“He would be, if it wasn’t for his wife.” Something in this remark told him that he and Phœbe were the subjects of the conversation. He listened, and heard the other woman say: “Let us thank Heaven, then, for his stupid wife. My dear, look at her! Like a housemaid!”

Maurice glanced across the room and saw Phœbe sitting alone, crowds of people all round her, but no one troubling to speak to her. The isolation was complete. For the first time he observed an extraordinary difference in her appearance from the appearance of all the other women. He had approved of her determination years ago never to wear a low-necked dress; he remembered how he had regarded the dresses of fashionable women in those days as immodest, shameless, brazen, ungodly; he knew that he had always been vaguely conscious of some difference in Phœbe’s dress on state occasions which was not merely a matter of neck; but now, for the first time, he saw in what this difference really consisted. Phœbe was not wearing evening dress at all. She was wearing a dress, so it seemed to him, which might have been worn in chapel on Sunday.

He felt vexed and disturbed. There were no diamonds in her hair; nor did he want them there; he was not even sure that he wanted her to wear a plume, a flower, a ribbon in her hair; but why on earth had she worn a walking-dress—a snuff-colored dress that had brown lace over the small square opening below the throat, the sleeves of which came down over the wrists, and which was without any suggestion of a train? Why did she sit there with so stiff an upper lip? Why did she look so stupid and censorious? Why did she suggest a housemaid?

In the midst of these angry questions, was the much more angry conviction that she stood in his way. *He*

would be, if it wasn't for his wife. What did that mean? Surely it meant that he would be the next Prime Minister if it were not for the social disqualifications of Phœbe.

For the first time in his life he apprehended two bitter truths. He saw that to lead a Party a man must have social status. He saw that Phœbe was not the great lady he had once taken her to be.

When these two thoughts rushed upon his mind he felt at once that he had known them for years. They did not come to him as revelations. They only emerged from the background of consciousness into the light and center of his apprehension. He felt angry with politics and angry with himself. The reception became suddenly a vain show, a wretched hypocrisy, a waste of precious time. The sound of laughter came to his ears from every side; wherever he looked people were smiling: the man chattering at his side was endeavoring to be facetious.

Maurice thought to himself, "We are tampering with democracy."

Someone touched his arm, and he turned round to find himself face to face with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Francis Martindale. The Chancellor was his strongest rival.

"You look bored," said Martindale.

"I am."

"But we are working ourselves up into a fine condition of Dutch courage. Where is your wife? I haven't seen her to-night."

"She is sitting over there."

"Ah, yes; I see. My dear Sangster, she looks really more bored than you! I must go and cheer her up."

As Mr. Martindale left him, Lady Claudia Martindale, his wife, looking like some glorious queen of fairy tale, crossed in front of Maurice, with a man at each side of her. She looked at him, smiled, and then turned, extending

her hand. "You look much better for the Riviera," she said. "Did you win a lot of money?"

"No," he answered; "I only lost a lot of time."

"Where is Mrs. Sangster?" she asked. "She did not go with you, did she?"

"No; she stayed at home. The Chancellor is talking to her."

"You mustn't speak of losing time," she said. "Your holiday has done you no end of good. Really, you look splendid. You'll feel like a giant in the House of Commons. Your speeches have been admirable—admirable."

"Shall we need giants?" he asked.

"More than we possess," she replied, lowering her voice, and laughing softly.

"I should have thought that we stood in need of thimble-riggers."

She looked at him intently for a moment. "I'm rather afraid that is true. But courage is needed even there. We must shuffle valorously!"

She passed on, and he looked after her for a moment, feeling that this beautiful and elegant creature was a greater rival than the Chancellor.

"Well, sir!" said a familiar voice at his side, and a hand grasped his arm with the intimacy of an old friendship.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Girshel laughed. "In the odor of sanctity, eh? Well, you've been away. You don't know what has been happening. I'll tell you later. My dear boy," drawing closer and whispering up at Maurice's ear, "I and the Prime Minister are bosom friends! Hush! Not a word to a soul! I'll tell you later."

When Maurice departed with Phœbe—and he had a very uneasy feeling as he passed through the crowded rooms with his wife—Girshel followed him, and on the stairs proposed that he should drive home with them.

"Well," he said in the carriage, addressing Phœbe, "what do you think of English society? How do you like it? Grand, isn't it? Did you ever see such a harem of beautiful women in all your born days? And the arrogance of them—the high-bred, disdainful, insolent arrogance—what do you think of that? Laugh! I've been laughing all the evening. I said to my friend Ravenstruther, 'Look, these are our rulers,' and by George! he agreed. Women rule politics. Petticoat government—it's the fact of our national life. If I were still a Socialist the first thing I should do would be to guillotine fashionable women. Think of all those beautiful necks—*slish*—and the tiaras and false hair tumbling into the sawdust!" He laughed violently, rubbed his hands vigorously, stamped with his feet, and then began feeling for his cigar-case.

"I think most of those women," said Phœbe, "ought to be ashamed of themselves."

"So naked, eh?" laughed Girshel. "Naked and unashamed! But, my dear lady, what would you? It's the world, it's the world."

"They call themselves Liberals," began Phœbe.

"Pah!" exclaimed Girshel; "you don't suppose they give a thought to politics!" He bit the end from his cigar, and lowered the window to spit it out of his mouth. "Those high-born dames are as Tory as any duchess on the other side," he continued, striking the match. "It's only a game with them—a social game. Patronage, that's what they like." He lit his cigar, and dropped the match on the floor of the carriage. "They've got to be on one side or the other—and there's more room on the Liberal side than on the Tory. Bless you, they haven't got half a principle between them. Think! pah, they only think of their flesh and their diamonds."

"I always hate these receptions," said Phœbe. "They depress me."

"Then why don't you stop at home?"

"Maurice says I ought to attend them."

Girshel looked at Maurice. "Why?" he demanded.

"It's expected," answered the Minister.

"Nonsense! If I were you," said Girshel, addressing Phœbe, "I should stay at home and rock the cradle, darn the stockings, and play with the children. You're not going to hold your own with women like that."

"You haven't told me yet," said Maurice, "why you——"

"Later, dear boy, later," replied Girshel, laughing. Then, leaning forward to Phœbe, "You strike, Mrs. Sangster!" he said. "Refuse to go. Say you aren't one of that sort. The Liberal Party could do with one or two simple, domesticated, middle-class women. Ah, that it could!"

Maurice said: "A Minister's wife must take her share in the social life of the party."

"I agree," said Girshel, "if the Minister wants to boss the crowd. But you're a Radical. You'll never be Prime Minister. You won't, dear boy, never; mark my words. Now, if you were the head of a *Radical* Party, Mrs. Sangster would be just the very woman for your purpose. She would take the lead of a Radical Party—mothers' meetings, girls' friendly societies, chapel bazaars, and conferences of social workers. She'd do that very well. But you don't mean to tell me that you expect her to take the lead of the Liberal Party? Why, look at the women you saw to-night. Thoroughbred racehorses aren't in it with them. Can you see them tripping into your parlor? Can you see Mrs. Sangster receiving them in your front hall?" He laughed noisily, opening his mouth to its widest, showing all his teeth, and tapping Phœbe on the knee in the excess of his hilarity.

Maurice said coldly: "You exaggerate the power of

those women. And you exaggerate their appearance. The dressmaker and the hairdresser——”

“Oh, rot! dear boy, rot!”

“But, Maurice,” exclaimed Phœbe, “you wouldn’t like me to dress like those women?”

“Rot! dear boy, rot!”

“I should like you to take your proper place in the party.”

“Do you mean that I ought to dress differently?”

“We won’t discuss the matter.”

“I can see how it is,” said Girshel seriously. “Your husband, Mrs. Sangster, is out for big game. He’s like me; the world has caught him at last. He wants power, he wants position, he wants rank. And he means to drag you after him. Now, listen: you’ll have to make up your mind. Either you’ll have to——”

“I beg you,” said Maurice, “not to worry yourself about a matter which doesn’t concern you, and which you understand very imperfectly.”

“I’ve offended you, dear boy! Sorry! Sorry! I didn’t mean to do that. Cheer up, Mrs. Sangster,” he said, leaning over to Phœbe. “I’ll send my wife to see you; she’s a winner for high life.”

Phœbe looked out of the carriage window with pain and perplexity in her eyes. She was horribly unhappy.

Girshel said to Maurice, “I’ll tell you about myself. You’re a busy man, and I daresay you won’t want me to come inside when we reach your house. I’ll tell you now. Look here; it’s like this. The world has caught you, and it has caught me. My boys are just going to school. Mrs. Girshel finds that she doesn’t get on in society as well as she would like. I’m richer now than I was, a good bit; we live in a fine great house—you must come and see us—and two of my boys are going to Eton this year—Benjy and Samuel. Well, Mrs. Girshel thinks a title would make

things easier for her—speed things up a bit. As for me, I don't give a snap of the fingers for a title; but Mrs. Girshel wants one; I want my boys to have the best start they can get, and so—— Well, I go to Ravenstruther. Party funds. Ten thousand pounds? I'm generous; the party is in a bad way; the brewers are putting up a big purse, things are looking black. I make it twenty thousand. Immense gratitude on the part of the Prime Minister. I dine with him. He is encouraged by my views. No mention of my gift to the party funds. He meets me as a Liberal, and takes counsel with me as a Liberal. But Ravenstruther knows! Well, there you have it. That's why I'm coming round to the Whigs. But wait till next year, dear boy. You'll find me as big a Radical as ever."

"And then they'll put you in the House of Lords?" said Maurice.

"Quite so, quite so!" cried Girshel, and laughed till the tears came into his eyes.

V

MAURICE was in his study, sitting over the fire. He was still wearing his Windsor uniform. He had drawn a small upright chair to the hearth, and sat leaning forward, with his feet on the fender, his elbows on his knees, his hands stretched over the few flames of a dying fire.

"Words" had passed between him and Phœbe. She had asked him, directly they entered the house, whether he was displeased with her. He had answered that he thought she might do more for him. She had replied that she looked after his children, cared for his house, and toiled every week to save his money—was that not enough? He had replied, "You do not understand!"

When she was gone, he drew the chair to the fire and

sat down to think. He saw that the woman was right who said that he might be Prime Minister if it was not for Phœbe. But he saw also that a powerful section in the party did not want him to be Prime Minister. *Let us thank Heaven, then, for his stupid wife.*

How everything had conspired to drive this fact sharply home to his mind! Lady Claudia had sailed across the bows of his ambition, beautiful as a queen, proud as a conqueror. And Girshel! Girshel had come to remind him that he was in the Cabinet on sufferance—a Radical, a Democrat, an upstart, an alien! They did not want him. They made use of him, but they disliked him. In the country he had a following; he was powerful enough to split the party; he could tumble the Government to-morrow—but it would be all the same in the end. Headquarters would not have him. London would never surrender to him. Society hated him.

He had almost forgotten Phœbe, so completely was his mind occupied by the thought of his own unhappy position in the party, when the door opened very quietly, and, turning his head, he saw her standing there, closing the door, and facing towards him with trepidation and appeal in her eyes.

She wore a long, dark blue dressing-gown of flannel, with red felt slippers on her feet. Her hair was plaited for the night, and the plaits were looped up over her ears. The shape of her head was quite visible, so vigorously had the hair been brushed back, so tightly had it been plaited, and so closely was it curled down at every point.

“Maurice!”

He turned more round in his chair, and regarded her with astonishment.

It seemed to him that her eyes had suddenly filled with terror, that she was trembling as if with cold, and that she was about to burst into tears.

"Maurice!" she cried again, slipping her fingers from the door-handle, and advancing a step towards him.

"What is it?" he demanded. "What is the matter?"

She uttered a little cry, hurried to his side, flung herself upon her knees, and pressed her face against him, sobbing bitterly.

"Phœbe!" he cried, putting his hand on her head. "Why, Phœbe, what is the matter? What has happened?"

"Oh, I'm so miserable, so miserable!" she wailed.

"Miserable? What has made you miserable?" He thought how round and smooth was her head, and lowered his hand to her shoulder, patting there. "Come," he said, "tell me. Why should you be miserable?"

"Oh, I'm in your way; I know I am. Maurice, I will try, I really will try, to be like the other women. You want me to be like the other women. You said you did. I didn't know it before. I would have tried if I had known it. Oh, Maurice, don't be cross with me! I'm so wretched, so miserable. You don't know how miserable I am."

She began to sob again, and he leaned over her, saying as cheerfully as he could:

"You are distressing yourself without any cause, Phœbe."

"Oh, no, no, no! I know I'm not," she cried, drying her eyes, mastering her sobs, and raising her face to him, all red and swollen, and wet with tears. "I know you want me to be like other women. I know you think I'm ugly, and dull, and frumpish. You wish I was like Miss Kingsford. You wish I was like Lady Claudia. You want me to be beautiful, and clever, and fashionable. I'm in your way. You want to be Prime Minister, don't you?—and you think I would not do for a Prime Minister's wife, as Mr. Girshel said. Don't you? Don't you?"

"Now, be reasonable and quiet," he replied. "Dry your eyes and let me tell you what is in my mind."

Poor Phœbe was worked up to a state of pitiable terror and hysterical dread.

"But you won't let us drift apart, will you?" she cried, praying to him. "Whatever happens, you won't let us drift apart? Think of the children! Suppose I should fail. Suppose I spoil your career. Oh, Maurice, Maurice, you loved me once. We've been so happy together. And the children—think of the children!"

"Why won't you let me explain matters?" he demanded. "I tell you that you are distressing yourself quite unnecessarily."

"Oh, but how coldly you speak! Once you would have caught me in your arms and kissed me, and comforted me, and promised me anything I asked."

"Phœbe, Phœbe!" he remonstrated, trying to pacify her.

"Ah, but a woman knows! Ever since you became a Cabinet Minister you've been different. I've seen it. I've tried to forget it. I've prayed, I've prayed, that you might come back to me. Think how happy we were in the old days! All that is gone now. It will never come back. I'm getting old. I've been too anxious about the children. We've drifted apart. You don't care for me now. You don't admire me. You don't think I'm the one woman in the world any longer. If I was to die, you'd marry again. You'd marry Miss Kingsford—someone who'd help you in your career. You know you would! Wouldn't you? Tell me! You'd marry again, wouldn't you?"

"Now, Phœbe," he said sharply, "you must restrain yourself. It is impossible to talk to you in such a mood as this. What has happened to you? . . . For the life of me I can't understand. Now, listen——"

"But you'd marry again, wouldn't you?" she cried, grasping his hands.

"How can you ask such a preposterous question? You're really beside yourself. For mercy's sake be rational and

decent. I mean to say—— Now, really, you must listen to me. Do you hear, Phœbe? I've something to say, and I mean to say it."

He disengaged his hands, rose to his feet, lifted her up, and made her sit in the chair.

"You'll catch cold," he said, and stooped to the fire, dragging the coals together. "You'd better let me give you a little whisky."

"Oh, no, no! I couldn't!"

"As a medicine. You're shivering with cold."

"No; I'm not cold."

He placed more coal on the fire, and then went to the table, poured himself out some whisky, and took a cigarette from the box.

"Now, Phœbe, let me tell you very briefly how matters stand," he said, and raised the tumbler to his lips. When he had finished drinking, he came round to the hearth, placed the tumbler on the mantelpiece, and struck a match for his cigarette. "I want you to understand the truth of things and to recall your excellent common sense while I am speaking." He lighted the cigarette, threw the match into the fire, and leaned his back against the mantelpiece, looking down at her head. "Now, to begin with——"

She put up her hand to interrupt him. "Wait a minute, Maurice," she said, "this fire will never burn up. Let me go downstairs and get some paraffin; I know where it's kept. The servants have gone to bed, but I can find it quite easily."

As she went to the door she stopped, and turned round to face him. "I'm so sorry I was silly," she said; "I couldn't help crying. I didn't mean to cry, I promise you." She tried to smile, and this smile made her look so very comic and ugly—for her face was puffed and red and marked with tear-stains—that Maurice had difficulty to restrain a shudder.

"You had better let me go with you," he said.

"What! In your Windsor uniform?"

It was her little effort to be cheerful, her enormous effort to behave, and she laughed. Poor Phœbe!

"Think what Lady Claudia would say if she saw you coming up our back stairs with a teacup of paraffin in your hand!"

She laughed again.

"No; you stay and keep warm. I sha'n't be a minute."

He remembered an occasion early in their married life when he had risen from the breakfast-table to fetch the butter which had been forgotten, and how outraged Phœbe had been by such an action on his part. She said to him:

"The master of the house going to the kitchen! I never heard of such a thing. Ring the bell, and I'll tell the maid to bring it."

He remembered how greatly he had admired her on that occasion; how he had regarded her imperiousness as an indication of the highest breeding.

He drank the rest of the whisky, and sat down in an armchair beside the fire, smoking his cigarette, and feeling exceedingly unhappy and annoyed.

"There!" she exclaimed, coming back into the room. "I haven't been long, have I?" She walked in a self-conscious way, holding the teacup in front of her, the other hand keeping her gown together, taking very small steps, sliding her feet along, as it were, and slightly shaking herself from side to side.

"I can't be very jealous," she laughed, "to appear before you like this, can I? You look like a Prince of Romance, and I am like a lodging-house keeper!"

She distributed the oil carefully over the coal, and placed the poker upright before the bars.

"Now, you shall tell me what you think," she said, and put the empty cup in the fender. "Look, it's burning

splendidly now." Before she sat down she went to him, kissed him with a laugh, and said cheerfully: "You do love me, don't you?"

"Of course I do," he answered, smelling paraffin.

"I've been a good mother, haven't I—even if I'm not so brilliant as Lady Claudia?"

"You've been the best mother in the world."

"Anyway, I've always taught the children to look up to you as their hero. Oh, Maurice, you don't know how they worship you! Baby said to me last night: 'Daddy would be King, wouldn't he, mummy, if there wasn't a Queen?' They had been disputing as to whether you would be President or King in the event of any change!"

He smiled, and threw away his cigarette. "She's a charming child," he said. "They're all charming. Humphry's going to be clever, too; I'm sure of it."

"He means to be Prime Minister!" she said. "Do you know they have debates in the nursery? Really, you ought to come up one day. Nurse and I can hardly keep our faces; they're too funny for words. Humphry tries to copy you. He considers himself a wonderful orator."

"Fancy; how amusing!"

"Little Mildred was so funny yesterday."

"Was she?"

"She brought me a letter from her cripple. You know they belong to the Cripples' Guild, and write a letter once a week to a poor little cripple living in the slums?"

"Yes; I remember."

"Well, this letter from her cripple ended up: 'Baby is very fat, and says "Bup," which mother thinks is a sign of great intelligence.' Mildred read it out to me, and said: 'Now, mummy, I don't consider that's a very high sign of intelligence, do you?' so gravely and seriously——"

"How very amusing!"

"Oh, but you ought to see those letters; they really are

funny. Lenn's cripple wrote to him just before Christmas, ending up a very cheerful letter, 'Well, no more news now, I think,' and then, after the signature, came: 'P.S.—I forgot to say that father has gone into a lunatic asylum, and, of course, it has upset us very much'——"

"In a postscript! Good Heavens, what a world it is!"

He rose from his chair, and went to the table for a cigarette.

"But I mustn't *run on*, as your father used to say. Tell me, Maurice, what you want to talk about. Look at the fire; isn't it burning splendidly?" She stooped down, picked up a piece of paper from the grate, lighted it, and held it up to him for his cigarette. "I'm glad you smoke; I'm sure it's good for you," she said.

Maurice sat down in the arm-chair, crossed his elegant legs, and began to speak in a slow, quiet, very earnest manner, looking into the fire. Phœbe, for her part, leaned slightly forward, with her hands between her spread knees, her feet, in their red felt slippers, far apart on the brass fender, her eyes directed to the flames.

"I am going to tell you Cabinet secrets," Maurice began; and from that he proceeded with his tale, in a solemn and troubled fashion, which had a very great effect upon Phœbe. He told her that he had enemies in the Government, that it was the intention of those enemies to limit his influence, and to prevent him from becoming Prime Minister; no more Radicals would be admitted to the Cabinet, and thus the evolution of the Liberal Party would be checked disastrously.

"It is not for myself I am working," he said firmly; "I am working for democracy. Liberalism is doomed unless it moves on to Radicalism. I am the only man in the Cabinet who can get rid of Whiggery, but I can only set up Radicalism if I am Prime Minister."

And then he told her that to consolidate his position he

must make his house the centre of a group. It was not enough to go about the country making speeches, not enough to work hard at his office, not enough to be constantly in attendance at the House of Commons; he must exert a social influence. The Radicals of the party and their wives must come to regard his house as the center of their propaganda, as the rallying point of their forces. "And," he concluded, "we must persuade the most advanced men in the Government, and their wives, to come to us—to come here to this house and regard us, you and me, as the heads of the party."

She listened intently. It seemed to her that everything he said was true and just. She felt, moreover, that she really could be what he wanted her to be, that she could help him to do what he rightly and nobly desired to do, and she said to him at the end: "I will try and be a better wife—I mean a better wife to you as a politician. I am not very clever, and we are not rich enough to make a great show in the world; but I think I could be useful in giving small parties here, and I am sure our parties will be much more comfortable than a crush like to-night."

He suggested that she should cultivate people, go more into society, visit the theaters, and read the books of which everybody was talking. "I think," he said, "that you *are* clever, and I am quite sure that you only feel yourself rather out of it at receptions because you give too much of your time to domesticity. And then, dress; it is only because you have been so unselfish in trying to save money that you don't look as showy as the other women. Mind you, I don't at all want you to be a fashionable doll; but I should like to see you wearing dresses that are rather more in keeping with surroundings like to-night's. And I am quite sure you would look as well as any of the other women, and be able to hold your own with them, if you did this."

Phœbe dared not cross his will, but her heart misgave her. She pretended that she agreed with everything he said, and promised to begin her reformation at once; but in her heart she was filled with grief, with mourning, and with anxiety. This change, she told herself, meant farewell to the nursery, farewell to motherhood, farewell to quiet days, and farewell to peace of soul. "He wants me to go to the theater!" she thought. "What would father say to that—father, who gives me so much money? He thinks I shall look like Lady Claudia; that it is all a matter of dress. He doesn't know that some women can look beautiful in a rag, and others plain in the robes of a queen."

They parted that night on the best of terms; but Maurice sat for another hour very gloomily over the fire, and poor little suburban Phœbe made her pillow wet with tears.

VI

ONE day, very soon after this conference between husband and wife, Mrs. Girshel came to call on Phœbe.

She was very short, very fat, and very jolly. She was one of those Jewesses who love eating, and who detest seriousness. She had a large fat mouth and a large fat chin, as well as the orthodox large fat nose, and she carried this homœopathy all over her body, for she had a large fat chest, a large fat stomach, large fat arms, large fat ears, large fat eyelids, and large fat feet; in fact, one hardly noticed her nose at all. To have placed her beside a Greek statue would have been a very effective challenge to the theory of evolution, and to have set her down to dinner with a Parsi lady or a Chinese peasant-woman would have been an awkward spectacle for the out-and-out believers in Western Civilization.

But Mrs. Girshel had a kind heart; her children had only to sulk and kick the legs of her best tables to be loaded with the most deadly chocolates. Her friends could never come too often to luncheon, to tea, and to dinner. She was always making parties for the theater, the exhibition at Earl's Court, and the music-hall. She would take ten or fifteen people down to Brighton for the week-end; she bestowed the most elaborate and costly presents upon her friends; she gave dinner-parties in hotels and restaurants; she sat up to all hours of the night playing cards; she permitted smoking in her drawing-room; and she kept at least four more servants than was necessary for the work of her establishment. It may be said that her servants adored her to her face, and called her very vulgar names behind her back.

She arrived before Phoebe's door in a gorgeous red and black chariot, with enormous C-springs, and a coat-of-arms on the panels which would have blinded Sir Philip Sidney. There were numerous bright-colored cushions at her back and a superb rug over her knees. Her coachman and footman wore the heaviest fur capes in London, and they had cockades on their hats, which were flat-brimmed. As for the tall horses, with scarlet rosettes at the side of their browbands, Royalty might have envied their arched necks, their high shoulders, and the way they stood with stretched legs before a front-door or a shop-window.

Mrs. Girshel entered the drawing-room with a fat pug in her arms. Phoebe almost laughed when she saw the apparition of this little, tubby, corpulent person, all wrapped up in furs, with the face of a staring pug under her chin. Lady and pug were both breathing noisily. Their faces seemed close together; the protuberant eyes of both had something of the same expression. "Really," thought Phoebe, "it might be mother and son!"

"My husband told me to come and see you," said Mrs.

Girshel. "I knew you wouldn't mind me bringing the dog. He thought I could help you; he said you wanted cheering up. He's all right! you needn't worry. He knows how to behave himself; he's only just sniffing round to see if there's any other dog on the premises. Benjy always thinks I can cheer people up; I don't know why, I'm sure, unless it's because I'm one of those who never worry about anything. Come here, Bertie; come here, you naughty darling! Well, how are you, Mrs. Sangster? I've met your husband, you know. Hasn't he got on, just! but I wonder if it's worth it. A lot of worry, I should think.

They talked for a quarter of an hour, and then Mrs. Girshel said: "I'm just going to order a couple of little frocks for next week. Would you like to come with me? Pop on a hat, and I'll drive you round. We'll go and have tea somewhere together."

Phoebe attempted to refuse, but Mrs. Girshel would not listen. She cross-examined Phoebe, discovered there was no valid reason why she should not spend the afternoon away from home, and fairly pushed her out of the room. "Now, be quick, and I'll wait here," she said, "and see what I can do to improve your drawing-room."

It was Phoebe's first introduction to a fashionable costumer's establishment. The carriage stopped before a fine door in a side-street, and Mrs. Girshel, with Bertie under her arm, led the way down a broad corridor and up a flight of stairs, which she found very trying, to the first floor. A door stood open, and as they entered, Phoebe saw a large room with chairs round the walls and no furniture in the center. She had scarcely entered this room, when she saw a sight which quite made her start—one of the models, with her hair dressed in most extravagant fashion, her eyes darkened, her lips reddened, her face powdered, walked—no, not walked, *minced*—

across the room in a dress that was the very latest dazzlement from Paris.

Mrs. Girshel dropped Bertie on to the floor, grabbed at her lorgnette, opened the glasses, and advanced into the room, staring after the model. "Now, isn't that *chic*?" she exclaimed, with great enthusiasm.

The room was L-shaped, and Phœbe discovered, on turning the corner, that the bigger part was very well filled with customers. Ladies were sitting, in fact, nearly all round the walls, and in the center of the room three models, who looked exactly like three *cocottes* out of the street, were gliding and swaying on their course, glancing at the ladies superciliously, stopping when ordered, turning their backs, lifting their arms, and advancing to the customers that the dresses might be handled and more closely examined.

One of the heads of the establishment, a jovial-looking Frenchwoman, came to Mrs. Girshel, and greeted her in friendly fashion, shaking her hand, and calling her Madame Girshel. Mrs. Girshel presented Phœbe, and Phœbe was much relieved to observe that this happy Frenchwoman did not cast disdainful glances at her frock.

When they were seated, Mrs. Girshel addressed the Frenchwoman in very bad French, *sotto voce*, and Phœbe was too distracted by what she saw to hear these remarks. It seemed to Phœbe that the place was really wicked and bad. She was "flabbergasted," as she said afterwards, that ladies, *real ladies*, could sit in that room and watch those women, *those positively awful women*, going backwards and forwards, wearing different dresses every time. And yet Phœbe had to admit to herself that those positively awful women, in spite of their rakish hair, their painted faces, and their insolent looks, had very beautiful figures: and she found herself at last taking considerable interest in the dresses they wore.

"Just look," she exclaimed to Mrs. Girshel, "at that woman's red heels—why, they must be six inches high! I never saw such things in my life!"

"That's to make them walk *chic*!" explained Madame Girshel.

"But how they walk! They remind me of camels at the Zoo. Oh, look, one of them's coming here! Did you ever? It looks as if her head will roll off, and her waist snap in two. Well, I never did. . . ."

The manageress had called the girl, and this exceedingly pretty maid now stood obediently before Madame Girshel, her body still seeming to quiver as if it were made of wires.

Phœbe, having stared at the little painted, insolent face, could scarcely prevent herself from laughing when she discovered that Mrs. Girshel was actually contemplating the purchase of this frock—this extravagantly beautiful frock, which could only be worn with grace by a tall, slender woman.

"Combien?" demanded Mrs. Girshel.

"Forty-seven guinea," replied the manageress. "Very sheap, very sheap, indeed. Just what would suit you. The very thing. Look, how *chic*!"

"Je vous donnerai forty-two guineas," said Mrs. Girshel.

"Impossible, Madame, im-pos-sible! I tell you"—whispered in great confidence—"this dress would be fifty guinea to anybody but you!"

"Pas de tout! Nonsense!"

"Nonsense—nonsense—nonsense!" laughed the French-woman. "Ha, you always say that. Nonsense! But, mon dieu! it is the truth. Look, you are a very good customer, Madame Girshel; we always give you best terms; and I tell you, to anybody else I ask fifty guinea. There! The price to you is forty-seven guinea. No less. No! Not a penny."

"Eh, bien. Montrez-moi quelque chose differente."

Other models were examined, more spirited bidding took place, and neither party would yield.

Phœbe was amused.

The frocks seemed to her, some of them at least, extremely beautiful; she liked watching the models walk to the far end of the smaller room, go behind a screen, and presently emerge in a new robe. She enjoyed watching the customers, who, for the most part, were rather fat, studying these sinuous models through their lorgnettes with the greatest attention, and talking among themselves with the volubility almost of market-women.

She was rather alarmed when Mrs. Girshel insisted that she should try on the jacket of a dress, but she had to yield, and when she looked in the glass she felt that the dress would undoubtedly suit her. The Frenchwoman said that madame would become a dress like that very well; the present dress she was wearing did not set madame off to advantage—it made her look too old; madame should wear fawns, and the skirts should be cut in such a way, the coats should be like this one.

Phœbe, who felt that all the models must be laughing at her and all the customers staring at her, was very glad to get out of the jacket and resume her seat against the wall.

Mrs. Girshel was still bargaining with the Frenchwoman, when Lady Claudia Martindale entered the room. She looked superb, and walked with a languorous indifference, her eyebrows raised, her lips pouting with disdain. Phœbe started at sight of her, but Lady Claudia did not recognize the Home Secretary's wife. She walked to the other side of the room, and sat down next to an ugly old woman, who greeted her with cordiality and was soon laughing and talking to Lady Claudia, indifferent to the models.

“That's Lady Claudia Martindale,” said Mrs. Girshel. Then, giving a nudge with her elbow against the knee of the Frenchwoman, she asked, “Who is she talking to?”

The Frenchwoman stooped down and said, "The Duchess of Worcestershire."

Phœbe said: "You'd never think they were enemies, would you?"

"Enemies!" exclaimed Mrs. Girshel. "Are they? How do you know that?"

"Well, Lady Claudia is one of our great hostesses, and the Duchess of Worcestershire is a leader of the Tories. I didn't know they were on speaking terms."

"Oh, political enemies!" laughed Mrs. Girshel; "that's nothing!" And she glanced up at the Frenchwoman, who didn't understand, as if to apologize for Phœbe's simplicity.

At that moment Bertie, who was lying complacently at his mistress's feet, contemptuously examining the models as they passed, emitted a particularly loud snort. Lady Claudia turned her head and glanced across the room. She saw Phœbe, started slightly, and was just about to rise and cross the room to her, when she caught sight of Mrs. Girshel. She contented herself with a nod and a smile, and turned once more to the Duchess.

After an hour in this establishment Mrs. Girshel rose, gathered Bertie into her arms, and waddled off without having bought anything. "I'm going straight to ——'s," she said, naming a well-known Regent Street milliner.

The Frenchwoman laughed contemptuously. "As if madame could get there anything worthy of her figure! Pooh, I am not afraid of ——! Go there, and see what you see! Tell me next time you come! Au revoir, madame, au revoir."

Going down the stairs, Mrs. Girshel stopped, and said to Phœbe, winking one of her fat eyelids, "When I get home there'll be a telegram for me, saying I can have the dresses at my price. She knows, bless you, I shan't buy anything at ——'s."

Nevertheless, they went to ——'s, and Mrs. Girshel

bought two splendid hats for Phœbe, which she insisted upon giving her, and also an opera cloak, which was really extremely handsome, but too handsome, perhaps, for Phœbe. Then they drove off to a fashionable restaurant and had tea together.

Mrs. Girshel was not an eloquent woman, but there was something really convincing in the brusque, downright, and cheerful manner in which she expressed her opinions. Phœbe might have thought her a very vulgar, even a very wicked woman, if she had not been so anxious to please Maurice. As it was, she thought that Mrs. Girshel was "common," that she was given to the world, and that she was certainly not a person of whom her father or Aunt Mildred would approve; but she could not help feeling all the same that this old woman was very good-hearted, and knew a great deal about the world, and might possibly help her in the perilous work of setting up her Radical salon.

She thought of Lady Claudia's nod, and that put her into something of a fighting mood. She told herself that Lady Claudia was a hypocrite and a snob, too; she determined that she would make herself a rival to this disdainful beauty who preferred talking to an ugly old Tory duchess rather than the wife of a Minister who sat in the very same Cabinet as her own husband. "I dare say," thought Phœbe, "she'll guess from seeing me this afternoon that I'm going in for society; she'll hate me, she'll try to fight me down; but I'll stand up to her." Poor little Phœbe!

"I shall be giving more parties this session," she told Mrs. Girshel. "I hope you and Mr. Girshel will come. I want to make my house one of the rallying points for the party."

"You must let me help you to put your drawing-room right," replied the old woman. "It's dreadful now. Oh, shocking! You want a rich gold paper, embossed, and a good heavy lincrusta on the ceiling, and lighter carpets,

and more gilt in your furniture. Benjy knows where you can get furniture at 33 per cent. discount. I'll take you there."

Next day a frock arrived for Phœbe from the great French dressmaker, with a card saying that it was sent by Madame Girshel.

And before noon Phœbe and Mrs. Girshel were driving about London together, buying furniture and talking worldly wisdom.

That night Phœbe should have dined at Clapham, but she sent a telegram instead. She made one of a party at the Trocadero Restaurant, and went on with Mrs. Girshel to a comic opera at the Gaiety Theater.

When she got home she found a parcel of "the latest" novels in the drawing-room, which she had ordered from Mudie's.

It was Mr. Grant Allen who sent her to sleep.

VII

IT was not only a most perilous session—it was the dreariest in living memory. The Government was skating on the thinnest of thin ice, but cutting so odd a figure, instead of the gymnastic and exciting 8, that the public did not care whether they went through or not. And if the country was bored, the House of Commons, which perhaps reflects the country only on these occasions, was bored too.

There was a growing feeling of discontent among advanced Liberals. Maurice found himself in the unhappy position of sharing their feeling and yet being forced to frown upon them with the official frown necessary for discipline. He was a member of the Government; it was

his duty and his interest to pretend that this dull and useless Licensing Bill was a measure of the very greatest importance, and officially, at least, he had to censure the extremists of his party.

The result of this defection, as they regarded it, was serious for Maurice. The Radicals doubted his sincerity, and began to look about for another and a bolder leader. They said that Sangster was only a further illustration of the evil effects of high office on political principles. It was impossible for them to fight under such a man. He was a beggar on horseback, a climber who had forgotten the ladder.

More than once Maurice forced the question of resignation. He was not in the least insincere; he was merely a practical man of affairs, who realized the full difficulties of his situation. If he resigned, Radicalism would suffer a defeat in the Cabinet. If he put himself at the head of the discontented Radicals he would split the Party of Progress, and let in the Party of Reaction. It must be some years, he told himself, before Radicalism could form a Government; was it not, then, the highest wisdom to remain where he was, leaving the Whigs and ready to open the gates of the citadel to the invading Radicals when they advanced in mass?

But if he appeared in the House of Commons as a faithful Liberal, who passionately believed in this fruitless and stupid Bill, and if he was extremely careful in the lobby as to the expression of his real views, he was a very forceful, diligent, and uncompromising Radical in the Cabinet. It was there that he fought his real battle; and no political battle against overwhelming odds was ever waged with greater courage. He warned his fellow-ministers again and again that they were "trading on the fast-disappearing patience of the poor"; he told them that the country was sick to death of their fumbling and fiddling;

he averred that nothing could save them from shipwreck but some bold and comprehensive attempt to adjust "the hideous, heathen, and infamous inequalities" of our social system; he threatened the Prime Minister, and attacked him on many occasions almost savagely.

Someone who told the story afterwards said that never in the House of Commons had he witnessed finer fighting than took place in those Cabinet Councils between the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary without the help of applause, and with none of the public excitements of debate, none of the conveniences of public speaking, and with the greater number of the Cabinet decisively opposed to him. Maurice fought the battle of democracy, the battle of progress, honesty, and courage against the forces of distrust, tradition, privilege, and hypocrisy. And although he was beaten in so far as the Prime Minister refused to consider any other measures but those in the Government programme, the Cabinet recognized that a new force had really appeared at last, and that the days of old-fashioned, easy-going, and histrionic Liberalism were drawing to an end.

Exhausted by the debate in the House of Commons and fretted by this secret strife in the Cabinet, Maurice was in no mood to appreciate the social functions by which Phoebe fondly hoped to establish his claim to the party leadership. If she had seemed dull to him in olden days, she was now an active irritant. He found it difficult at times to sit still when he heard her discussing books or describing plays—always in a tone of voice which she hoped would reach him and impress him. Her opinions were bourgeois in the extreme. She had not the smallest perception for literature. She had likes and dislikes, prejudices and enthusiasms, but no discernment, no criteria, no sense of real beauty and real truth. She read reviews industriously, she managed to pick up the vernacular of second-rate criticism, and she delivered her judgments with

all the force and energy of unconscious ignorance. Often it was quite terrible.

Then there was the matter of her raiment. Alas, the poor lady really did not know how to dress, or perhaps there was some stubborn remnant of Puritanism in her figure which made suitable dresses seem dull and commonplace directly she put them on; whatever it was, Phœbe came to think that brilliant colors, exceedingly large hats, and the most fashionable style of garments could alone give her that appearance of distinction which she coveted with all her heart, for Maurice's sake. She was appallingly and pathetically suburban.

It is true that at the beginning of her social campaign Maurice was extremely pleased with Phœbe. The sudden change blinded his vision. Perhaps he was not a very discriminating observer of women and their clothes; perhaps it was only by contrast that he could decide in these matters what was right and what was wrong. Phœbe by herself, in her first smart gown, with her hair in the latest mode, seemed to him quite a notable figure; but later, when he saw her among the great ladies of the party, he realized that she was more than ever in his way—that she was, indeed, disastrously in his way.

Did he remember that she had slaved for him in his early days? that her narrowness was at one time a quality he admired in her? that all those things which distressed him now in her appearance had accumulated in the work of her faithful and devoted motherhood? I am afraid not. Politicians do not go back to causes. They live from hand to mouth. Maurice only knew that he had climbed by prodigious efforts to the rank of a Cabinet Minister, and that he was thwarted now, held back, and ruined in the consummation of his ambition by this dull, stupid, and irritable Phœbe, who was growing every day more vulgar, more impossible.

One night they gave a dinner-party at which two Cabinet Ministers, the editor of a very important review, and the most scholarly of women writers were among the guests. It was a dinner-party of ten people, and the table (which was really rather restaurant-like) seemed to Maurice a distinct success. He was pleased and happy. He appeared to his guests in confident mood. He liked the feeling that he was entertaining these distinguished people so fashionably in his own house.

But half-way through dinner there was one of those pauses in which only a single voice is heard speaking. And the voice on this occasion was the voice of the scholarly woman writer, who was saying to the editor at her side that she thought Arnold might do more for English Literature than Saint-Beuve had done for French.

Phoebe jumped at an opportunity. With a loaded fork half-way to her mouth, screwing up her face into smiles of enthusiasm, she leaned forward and said: "Oh! I'm so glad to hear you praise Arnold. I think the 'Light of Asia' is sweet. It is like 'In Memoriam,' isn't it, only Eastern?"

The lady was very gentle and charming. She replied that it was some time since she had read the "Light of Asia." Phoebe knew that she had blundered; she saw some of the men exchange looks, she glanced up the table, and as well as the red-shaded candles would allow her, thought that she saw annoyance on Maurice's face.

"Have I said anything dreadful?" she asked, forcing a laugh. "I thought you were talking of Arnold. Weren't you? I'm so sorry if I made a mistake."

The Cabinet Minister at her side very gallantly said: "I, too, thought it was Sir Edwin Arnold of whom they were speaking; apparently it was Matthew Arnold."

"Matthew Arnold?" exclaimed Phoebe. "Oh, I know. Yes, of course. The headmaster of Rugby."

"Well, his son," replied the Cabinet Minister encouragingly. "Quite a gracious poet, but with too few readers." And he looked up the table, asking some question as to whether Matthew Arnold's achievement in such a book as "Literature and Dogma" was worth the sacrifice of his poetry.

Things of this kind, little *faux pas* that were really not of any considerable consequence, were always happening; and the more often they occurred the harder did Phoebe steel her heart. She was one of those timorous, diffident, overstrung women who come at last in their difficult and unwilling fight with the world to brazen things out, who really exalt their ignorance in the flippancy of their apologies, who make a swagger of their lack in culture, and appear to be always perfectly self-satisfied. She gave one the impression of regarding really cultured people as artificial and affected.

Mrs. Girshel was an immense comfort. Phoebe went frequently to the Girshel mansion, and derived strength from the bold materialism and complacent worldly wisdom of the rich Jewess. Perhaps she caught from Mrs. Girshel that hardness and loudness and effrontery which came at last to extinguish the dwindling grace of her modesty. She was too busy now for the religion which had helped her and in some way had saved her from disaster, even if it were a religion almost void of beauty and tenderness. She wanted support, she found it in the strength and security of Mrs. Girshel's worldly wisdom. After all, she came to think, it is natural to enjoy life; Puritanism has been tried and it has failed. Mrs. Girshel's central idea in philosophy was the good effect upon health and temper of cheerful thoughts. "It's no use brooding," she used to say. And she said that wives lost the affection of their husbands by being "stodgy," and "cooky," and "frumpy." A wife, said she, ought to keep young, and the only way to

keep young was to have a good time and never give way to the blue devils.

It became very difficult indeed for Maurice, as this distracting session wore on, to support the burden of Phœbe's increasing worldliness. He had excellent excuses, of course, for avoiding her society, and, in truth, he did see but very little of the poor lady. However, there were occasions when he longed to escape from the House of Commons, from office, from club, from dinner-party, and from public meetings—to escape from all the irritation and obsession of party strife, from the toil and dullness and routine of administrative work—to escape from it all and rest in the peace of a home that was deeply and endearingly happy.

No such home existed for him.

On these occasions he would sometimes send a telegram to Hampstead, asking if he might go there to dinner, and in no other house in London was he so easily able to rid his mind of its cares. The Kingsfords knew that Ruth helped him in his political career; they knew that he had the greatest regard for her; and they also knew that she admired him and counted him as a friend only second to Father Prague. They trusted Maurice, and they did not dishonor Ruth even by considering whether they could trust her. In this way Maurice and Ruth were allowed the greatest imaginable freedom. They sat together quite alone in Ruth's sitting-room, or spent hours together in the garden.

One morning, four men came to breakfast with Maurice—a prominent Radical peer, two of the most cynical Radicals in the House of Commons, and Girshel, who had now tacked himself on to Maurice and was fairly well known in the party. They chatted of politics in a rather tradesman-like manner at breakfast, entirely ignoring Phœbe, who had a bad cold and sniffed horribly; and then

went to Maurice's study to smoke and discuss a serious matter.

They were in the midst of their discussion when Phœbe, dressed to go out, entered the room, pulling on her gloves. The peer rose, the two members of Parliament followed his example; Maurice and Girshel merely turned their heads.

"Don't dislocate yourselves!" said Phœbe cheerfully. The blue feathers in her hat vibrated as she pulled on her gloves. "I've only come, Maurice, to tell you I'm going out."

"Oh," he said, "all right," and turned his head round again.

At that moment a sneeze, very violent, overtook the poor lady, and to get over the awkwardness of it, she tried by various contortions and a shrill note to her ejaculations, to make a comic sneeze of it. Three times she sneezed in this manner, and then, laughing, dabbing her eyes, and rubbing her red nose:

"Will you be home to luncheon?" she asked.

Maurice was irritated beyond measure. "How can I tell, how can I possibly tell?" he demanded. "Yes—no; what does it matter?" And then to the peer, "Please sit down, and let us finish our talk. *Shall I be home to luncheon?*" he muttered.

The discussion was continued, and twenty minutes after Phœbe's departure Maurice was alone with Girshel.

"Do you know what you ought to do?" demanded Girshel, standing in front of Maurice, a cigar in his hand. He stooped his knees, put his little monkey's face close to Maurice, and said, "You ought to resign directly the session is over, sacrifice everything, every blooming thing, and go through the country with one cry, one single cry—*Down with the Lords!*"

"I believe you're right."

"Why don't you? Look. Until the Lords are out of the way, not a single Liberal measure worth a sixpence will ever get on the statute book. How can you hope for Radical measures? What's the use of talking about Radical measures? Does a traveler talk about the mint sauce he'll eat with his lamb when he gets to his inn if a two-headed tiger is standing in his path? My boy, you've got to down the Lords—*down 'em*—before you can move an inch. That's your trump card. Play it. Get it out and slam it down on the table. Go to the country; tell 'em the truth; and don't come back till you're at the head of a Radical Party."

"You're perfectly right."

"My boy, I know I am! You're not only losing time now, you're losing reputation. You're not the great agitator you were; you're not the people's demagogue. What will you be five years hence? Just a formal critic of a Tory Government!"

"I've thought of that cry. Down with the Lords, and Housing Reform! The two together. But—well, it means money. To be frank, I can't afford it. My expenses are increasing. I've got nothing but my salary. If I resign I shall be a beggar."

"Look here, Sangster, why do you talk like a fool?" demanded Girshel, stooping again, and laying a hand on Maurice's arm. "Who's your father-in-law? Humphry Champness. Good! Who's Humphry Champness? A millionaire!"

Maurice opened his eyes. "A millionaire?" he exclaimed. A light flashed in his soul.

"Of course he is," laughed Girshel. "Don't you know how money doubles itself? Why, that old fellow's capital has been growing for the last ten years like mustard and cress. He simply sits still and watches it. You know his secretary—Jiggins? They had a quarrel; Champness de-

graded him and put him in an inferior position; I've got him now. A drunken, clever fellow. He tells me about old Champness. How much does that old fellow spend? A thousand a year, perhaps; say two, to be on the safe side. And what does he do with the balance? Invests it at seven, eight, ten per cent. Suppose he invested seventy thousand pounds last year at only six per cent. What has it grown to now? Seventy-four thousand pounds odd. And he invests that at eight per cent., and so on, and so on. Savings, mind you, just his savings! The capital's doubling itself all the time—compound interest! Why, he's as rich as I am, without working for it—richer, perhaps; and he spends a thousand a year."

It had never occurred to Maurice that old Champness in Clapham was prodigiously rich. A millionaire! Was it really possible? His mind busied itself with a hundred schemes.

"You heard what he said to his son at that joke-dinner he gave us?" continued Girshel. "The money is not going *his* way. Who else is there?"

"That's all very well, but we aren't on the best of terms."

"Whose fault is that?"

"You mean that I could mend matters?"

"Of course I do. Why, my dear boy, the cards are all in your hands—you've only got to play them. What is the old man's madness? The bee in his bonnet, I mean? Rome, isn't it? Very good. He's getting worse on this head every year. He hates Rome. He hates priests. So do I; but I'm not crazy on the subject; he is. Now, it's a very good thing for you he is crazy on the subject. Why? Because you can work him on it. *It's the one weak spot in a soul of iron.* Who was the chap with the tender heel? Hector or Ajax or Julius Cæsar, or somebody. Well, anyway, Rome plays the part of that heel in your father-in-law's otherwise invulnerable anatomy. God in heaven!"

he exclaimed, thoroughly roused, "if I was in your shoes I'd be as sure of that million as I am of to-morrow's breakfast!"

"I don't quite see."

"Don't you?"

"I can't stump the country like an Orangeman. Besides, I'm not prejudiced in the matter. I feel——"

"Oh, stuff, man, stuff! A million of money, and you don't know how to get it! There's always a way for the softest conscience and the stupidest brain where money is concerned, always. Now, listen. *Everything is in your favor.* You go down to see him—on business, mind you—and you say to him the menace from Rome is increasing; but you can do nothing to check it till the Lords are out of the way. Is he ready, you ask, to back you for a ten years' campaign against the Lords, at five thousand a year; if so, you'll resign. Why! it's as easy as falling off a log!"

When Girshel had gone Maurice set out to walk to Whitehall.

Now, it was one of those mornings when many school-boys go most unwillingly to their books and a considerable number of old gentlemen walking sedately towards the city are visited—so it is said—by a passionate desire to play leapfrog with policemen. There were very few leaves on the trees, the air was still fresh enough for a light overcoat, and the weather had by no means settled down to the fact that summer was nearly due. But the sun shone so vividly and so cheerfully, the sky overhead was such a very blithe blue, the wind was blowing, too, as if it were minuet music and not a devil's hornpipe, and all the little sparrows on London roofs and in the branches of London plane-trees were chavishing so excitedly after last night's storm and rain, that nearly every single person in London, even the rich City men as well as the jolly beggars in the

gutters, felt that life was distinctly good, that the world could hardly have been made any better if Messrs. Huxley, Tyndall, and Herbert Spencer had been given a free hand with the protoplasts; in short, all mankind trusted the universe and felt very cordially towards the fortuitous concourse of atoms which had produced this particularly jolly morning. Maurice felt himself exhilarated. The red faces of the busmen, the impudent faces of errand boys, the pretty faces of the Misses Kensington going a-shopping, the innocent faces of children playing horses in front of perambulators, even the happy faces of policemen, postmen, dustmen, and workmen—all these faces of humanity seemed to greet Maurice and tell him that life had taken a turn for the better.

And he kept saying as he went along, "A million of money, a million of money, a million of money!" No finer march music in the world, as all mankind agrees. He went into a postoffice, and sent a telegram to Ruth.

There was nothing at the Home Office to detain him. Half an hour with the permanent under-secretary, and half an hour afterwards with his private secretary, sufficed. He left the office, jumped into a cab, and drove to the assignation in Hyde Park.

"I want to consult you," he said, "on a matter that may be fairly called life and death!"

"Something has happened?" inquired Ruth.

"Will you give me the whole day?"

"The whole day? But what do you propose? The House meets at——"

"Come with me. I've arranged things. We'll drive to Victoria, take the train to Richmond, lunch at the Star and Garter, and then walk to Petersham and back by the river. Do come! I want to consult you. It will be like Cap Martin again. And it's *such* a day! I may not have a chance like this for years. Yes, something has happened."

VIII

IN the train he told her his story. He did not say that if he resigned he would be living on Humphry Champness, and therefore it was not necessary to speak about the pledge he would have to give regarding the Roman Church. The question presented to her was this: Should he resign and go to the country with an unauthorized programme of real and honest social reform, or should he cling to office with the rest of the Cabinet and wait for the future to decide the course of Liberalism?

While they were in the train she debated this question with great seriousness. His career was at stake. She knew how precarious was his position in the Cabinet, she was aware of how the Whigs disliked him, and she was not convinced that the country wanted social reform.

She asked him of what his unauthorized programme would consist, and he told her that he must needs concentrate at first on the abolition of the House of Lords. This frightened her. She begged him to consider how essential was a second chamber to democratic government, and also to ask himself whether the country was seriously interested in the question of the Lords. "I thought your programme," she said, "was to be a programme of social reform—housing, fair wages, and shorter hours of toil—but here you are at the very outset, tinkering the Constitution, like the Whigs and the Tories." He explained that until the Lords were out of the way, social reform could not be obtained; democracy, he thought, would understand the necessity of this constitutional reformation if it were thoroughly explained to them.

Still she was doubtful and troubled. "No," she said

at last with decision, "you must not take so great a risk for so small a chance of victory."

It was awkward for him that he could not tell her about the million of money.

"No," she said, "the risk is too great."

But when they left the train and were in the pure air of the hills above the river, when the scents of the trees and the grass came to her with the full cheerfulness of summer, when she found her mind filling with the sense of life as an adventure which called for qualities greater and more heroic than those which go with acquiescence and routine, and when she realized that this man at her side was a great fighter and a bad clerk, then she altered her opinion, laughed into the face of the sweet morning, and said to him: "Yes, risk everything! Why not? I would rather see you wounded and beaten than rusting in dull prosperity."

At this he began to have doubts and fears.

Was that cry of the Lords, after all, a cry which the country would echo? Perhaps she was right: democracy was not interested in a question that must seem to them purely academic, which concerned the science of government, not even the slumber of their overworked, sordid, and soul-crushing lives.

She laughed again. "What does it matter, whether you win or lose?" she asked him. "The thing for you is to fight. You are not a ruler, you will never be a statesman of routine, diplomacy is no more your *métier* than music or mathematics; you are a demagogue, an agitator, the voice of the awakening millions. Shout, my friend, shout; die shouting rather than live as a whisper. Oh yes; you must go to the people. I am quite sure of that. What is the verse which sings the faith and courage of the man who works for posterity? 'And yet I doubt not!' 'Others the harvest of our toil shall see?' Oh, but better than that, Shelley's contempt for the coward and the temporizer—

'the trembling throng whose sails were never to the tempest given.' You are not meant, I think, to sail in small waters, certainly not to pull a row-boat up and down the Serpentine. No; the storm, the tempest, and the risk!"

She was so happy that she clapped her hands and laughed.

"How splendid you are!" he cried.

"Am I?" she asked, raising her head a little. "But everyone is splendid who sees that life is growth, development, ceaseless change. That's what makes men and women lift up their heads. Humanity has been too much preached down. We've all been thinking too much of our duty and our responsibilities. We've been afraid to live. Dear Queen Victoria has made a seminary of England, and the nineteenth century is just a schoolmistress's curriculum. Now we begin to comprehend what is meant by a boundless universe and eternal life. We can breathe. We can hope. What is better, we can look forward with interest and curiosity and delight. It's so big, so big!"

She was thinking of Father Prague, whose great strife with the ultramontanes of the Vatican had just begun.

"I believe you are now more of a democrat than I am!" he said, looking at her and seeing how the color had come into her cheeks.

"I've got no name for myself except one," she replied.

"A Catholic?"

"Yes, a Catholic."

"But you are not like most Catholics."

"There are many Catholics who follow the same star as I follow. We Catholics are beginning to move, too. We, too, are waking. You will see in twenty years!"

"I thought that Rome never changed?"

"Are there any walls that can keep out the Time Spirit?" she asked. "Is there any mop that can brush back the Atlantic of evolution? Oh, you are wrong if you think error impregnable! I can see now that everything is

changing, everything moving into wider and fuller consciousness of life. There are Catholics in France, Catholics in Germany, and Catholics in America who perceive that the Church must change because Christ changes—changes with every generation. He is not dead, but living! He goes with us; He doesn't look on. That is our discovery. That is the wave that is going to carry humanity from the nineteenth to the twentieth century."

She turned to him and continued: "But your life, your career. What are you going to do with it? I still think your cry is a bad one for immediate victory; but do you want immediate victory? Suppose John Baptist had thought he possessed the key of Millennium? What a failure he had been! Your cry will do if you are honest, and if you tell democracy that the way before them is long and toilsome——"

He interrupted her. "No, it is not long. The distance is only the will of democracy itself. That's my message! Democracy is omnipotent. It can get rid of its chains tomorrow. Without a shot being fired, there can be in England the greatest revolution in the history of mankind. Democracy has only to turn a key already in the lock to step out from its prison into freedom."

"Yes, but Democracy has got to want freedom, has got to realize that it does live in a prison."

They came to the hotel, and while she rested after the walk he went and ordered luncheon, choosing everything he thought would please her, but leaving to the head waiter, for he was not very well informed in such matters, the choice of the champagne.

Yes, he was so elated and excited that he ordered champagne.

While they were waiting for luncheon, they amused themselves by watching the carriages and tandems and hansom-cabs which arrived from London, bringing fash-

ionable people to this delightful hotel above the river, which had figured in a novel by Ouida and was regarded as a very dashing place by the bloods of the day.

During luncheon the mood of the place seemed to take possession of them. Everybody appeared to be very healthy and very cheerful. There was no suggestion of languor or boredom. Here and there among the couples at small tables Ruth detected the strain, the anxiety, and the whispering confidence of a grand passion, but for the most part the room was filled with people to whom the keen air and the drive from town had given a sharp appetite, and who were at the tables to eat, drink, and enjoy themselves. The fine day had knocked all that nonsense—the nonsense of Eros—out of most of those heads. People were not sentimental; they were festive.

Maurice was evidently recognized by several of the guests, for Ruth noticed how often, and in some cases how persistently, heads were turned in his direction. She studied Maurice's face more closely. She had never known him as the smooth and unctuous youth who attended chapel prayer-meetings and who sought to convert everybody with whom he came in contact. From the beginning of their acquaintance his face had been marked with intensity of purpose, the impatience of a masterful will, and the strength of manhood. But now she saw in his face something which she had not deeply observed there before—lines of sharp suffering, an expression in the lips of pain, a look of almost settled sorrow in the dark eyes.

She wondered if the toil and excitements of a public career had set those marks upon him, or whether there was something else in his life which racked his soul.

It occurred to her that perhaps she had been unwise to come to this place with him. The men who stared at him were looking also at her—closely and questioningly. Was

it unwise? Could she really afford to do things like this? Might it not, perhaps, damage him as well as her?

Then the feeling of cheerfulness, of well-being, returned to her; what did it matter? What did anything matter? To be free, to take risks, to challenge all the stupid and timorous conventions of Society, to live boldly and greatly and strongly—this was the existence of the future. She smiled in her heart to think of the Mrs. Grundy of Protestant circles. Catholics had never bowed to that feminine saint at least. And Catholics would be freer still; they were the pioneers. A Protestant Sabbath! How dreadful, how appalling, how old-fashioned and absurd! Catholics had always led the way.

She raised her glass to her lips, and just before she drank, said to him with a smile, "To the sail that will be given to the tempest!"

He looked up quickly. All the melancholy of his face disappeared, but even in the brightness of his eyes and the happiness of his smile there was still that look of hidden suffering, suffering suppressed and held in leash, which had set her wondering.

She thought to herself, "He is really very handsome."

"Ah!" he exclaimed, quite bitterly, raising his glass and looking at her very intently, "if only you were always at my side!" Then he drank a little wine, still looking at her, and set down his glass. "Why do I come to you whenever I am in trouble? Why is it always of you I first think when I find myself at cross-roads? God, how happy my life might have been!"

"You think of me," she said hurriedly, her face rather white, "because I am your very true friend; because you honor me and respect me."

"Because," he said with emphasis, "you are the only friend I possess in the world."

"Well, the only friend; but a friend because I live in your honor and your respect."

"Friendship such as mine," he said, "goes deeper than that. One can honor and respect at a distance, but friendship that is vital struggles to break down barriers and to get close, close to the very heart of that other and much dearer self. It is no use playing with words. It's no use shuffling and making a pretense. I loathe dishonesty. I hate prevarication and chicanery. Let's be honest, you and I. Quite honest. Shall we?"

She found it difficult to speak. She found it even difficult to take her eyes from his. It seemed to her as she struggled to find words that he was throwing a spell upon her. How difficult it was to breathe.

"You bade me take risks," he said. "But to take risks in politics is nothing. You scorned the temporizer and the coward. But the temporizer and coward in politics is less of a fool than the temporizer and coward in life. Why do we both funk? why do we both shuffle and pretend? We are great fighters, outside our own hearts—oh, tremendous! We are quick to charge the world with cowardice and temporizing weakness; but what of ourselves, of our hearts, of the center of our lives? Are *you* brave there? Are *you*? I wonder if you really are as brave there as you would have me brave in politics?"

She said to him, "Did I tell you to be rash and unwise in your courage?"

"Oh, don't play with words!" he cried.

"Did I tell you to sacrifice honor? These are not words! Don't wreck our friendship. Try to value it equally with your political career."

"I value it a thousand times more."

"Then preserve it."

"I would not wreck it for heaven and earth," he said earnestly. "Why, don't you know that it is the only thing

I possess which makes my life worth living? Do you think I would throw *that* away? That which alone makes my life worth living? Why, I should be throwing life itself away. I am not such a madman. What do I ask? What do I propose? I ask for the utmost confidence of friendship. That is all. Honest, truth-dealing friendship. I am hungry and thirsty for that. I want one great truth in my life. I want one absolute reality. I want your friendship in its fullness—everything you can give me as a friend—your confidence, your uttermost confidence, and the love of your heart and soul. Why not? You know that I love you above every creature on earth. We only pretend that we don't know that. It is only dishonesty and cowardice that keep us as we are. Why should we not tell each other frankly what we know is in our hearts? It would make our friendship grander, more beautiful, more honest. That's what I want—honesty, truth. One can't go on living as I am living now. The heart of man is made for confidence and faith. Look at my life! Is there to be no one for me in the whole world, out of all the millions of my fellow-creatures, to whom I may go and unburden the pain in my heart, the grief of my soul, the longing and desire of my spirit? Would you turn aside if a man came to you dying of starvation? I will teach you a proverb. Listen. It is a heathen proverb, a proverb made by savage people to whom we send our missionaries, our suburban moralities, and our swindling commercialism. *Not to aid one in distress is to kill him in your heart.* What do you think of that?" He looked at her, repeated the proverb again, and said quietly, "I am in distress; my cry is to you."

What really touched her, what really appealed to her, was the look in his eyes as he uttered this veritable and yearning cry of his heart. She seemed to see all at once into the awful solitude of his soul. The face of a famished prisoner looking through the bars of his prison would have made

the same poignant and insurgent appeal to her compassion as the face of this man's spirit straining towards her behind the veil of his eyes. He was isolated. He was suffering. He was dying in the anguish of his need. He really wanted a friend.

"I will be honest, then," she said quietly. "I care for you; I know that your life is difficult. I know also that you care for me. I am glad you care for me; and I am not ashamed that I care for you. There! I am no coward. I am quite happy and unafraid. Are you satisfied?"

"Say that you know I love you."

"I know you love me."

"Will you say——"

"Yes; I love you."

Such a light came into his eyes that she was frightened.

"I love you," she made haste to add, "as a very dear friend, as a friend whose honor I would preserve, as a friend who deserves my love because he is brave, because he is a man of honor."

He put his napkin on the table. "You love me," he said. "That is enough. Now, let us go."

When they were in the Park he told her that from that day he was born a new man. Life had now opened definite gates to him. He was going out to conquer the world. "You have given me," he said, "a new and greater life; because you have not killed me in your heart."

"So long as our friendship is true friendship," she replied, "we shall be happy."

"Love such as mine," he answered, "could not play the traitor."

They walked together under the trees, and for the first time in all their long and close intimacy he spoke frankly of his home life. At first she was unwilling to hear him and begged him not to speak of those things; but he assured her he would say nothing dishonorable. "I have played

so long, and tortured myself so cruelly, with make-believe," he said bitterly, "that you cannot tell how pleasant a thing it is to feel that one can be utterly true at last. I want to tell you everything that is in my heart. I am penetrated by the deepest happiness I have ever known just because I can be an absolutely true man for the first time since I came to real consciousness."

He spoke so calmly and so convincingly that she felt she could trust him. Afterwards she confessed that she was curious to know about his domestic life, and that her real sin lay in this unworthy appetite for gossip. Nothing upbraided her more sharply than this knowledge that she wished him to speak about those things and that as he spoke she was gratified by the knowledge of his wife's imperfect sympathy. She shuddered when she remembered the jealous gratification with which she listened to his recital of Phœbe's failure to understand him.

But the real emotion which made her yield to him was a genuine and a deep emotion. Unwisely and unworthily she might have acted in the beginning; while there was yet time she might certainly have saved herself; but in the end it was impossible for her to think of his wife and children, impossible for her to consider the canons of morality, impossible to reflect upon the consequence of sensations that were like the flow of a fierce river.

She had allowed her soul to drift, to be carried dreamfully and carelessly on the slow-moving, tranquil, and innocent tide of human sympathy. It was not till the last moment, when the roar of the waters at the great fall came suddenly to her ears, that she knew in one wild, frantic second of struggling agony of the depths to which the river would hurl her. And after that moment it was useless to struggle. The slow-moving river, in a moment, was a cataract. Oblivion swept over her, body and soul. It was like a swoon, like the loss of consciousness. She knew that

his arms were about her, that his lips were pressed to her lips, that his breath was pouring into her body, that her soul was rushing out to greet, to hail, and to hold him forever in that ecstasy of surrender, that wonderful, passionate, and suffering giving of herself to find herself.

When he drew back his face, released the pressure of his arms and, still holding her, his eyes still close to hers, asked her if she loved him, she bowed her head and let her lips cling to him again.

All that she had ever longed for in mysticism was in that kiss. She felt herself utterly pure and transcendently satisfied. It was the flight of the one to the one—the loss of self, the surrender of Ihood, the completion of her separate and divided spirit.

But gradually into her reviving consciousness came the knowledge that this kiss was the beginning and the end. She raised her hands, forced them quietly under his arms, pressed them against his breast, and, drawing back her head, strained herself gently away from him.

"I must go," she murmured. "Let me go. I must go home."

She looked about her, frightened, suspicious, guilty.

There was no one to be seen.

She came closer to him, put her hands on his shoulders, gazed deeply, entreatingly, oh, with such agony, into his eyes, the eyes that had betrayed her. "Forgive me," she pleaded, "forgive me."

He would have kissed her again, but she drew clear away from him.

"Have I made you angry?" he asked. "You don't regret——"

"Regret!" she exclaimed. Then she smiled sadly and looked away from him. "Don't you know," she asked, very slowly and tenderly, "that I have ruined our friendship?"

He protested that their friendship had been consecrated

by that kiss, that if there were blame, it was he alone who was guilty.

"No," she said. "I am the woman, and it is the woman who has been blamed from the beginning of the world—rightly, rightly, oh, so rightly!"

She listened to all he had to say; she promised him in the end that she would still continue to be his friend; she said that her heart was not now so unhappy and distressed as it had been at first, but in her soul she was full of remorse and bitter sorrow. She said to herself, "I have struck a defenseless woman. I am unchaste forever. And I thought I was strong!"

When they were going back to London she said to him, "Do you remember I once told you, warned you, that those who seek to alter the world are altered by the world? Well, I have been seeking, ever since we first met, to alter you, and it is you who have altered me. To interfere with another soul is perilous work. Why didn't I leave you a Radical? Why did I try to make you Conservative and Catholic? See what has happened? I have become a Socialist, and I have lost——" She checked herself. "No," she said emphatically, "I will not say that! I will never reproach you. I won't even reproach myself. We are human beings. What we have done could not be avoided. We allowed ourselves to drift, till it was too late. That is all. We are sorry. Let us put our sorrow, with the cause of it, at our backs. Let us forget it. I am still your friend. We have sealed our friendship by a moment's mistake. And now we must be stronger for it. We must be faithful and true friends, who know each other so well that they keep watch and guard over their friendship."

It was easy for her to tell him this. It was easy while he was with her, to believe that it was true. At that moment she felt herself untroubled and secure. She had found an excuse which her reason approved.

IX

WHEN he left her in London the excessive commotion in his brain had died down into a calm that was without peace or the promise of peace. He realized that he had taken his Eden by violence, and that he was now cast out by the angel with the flaming sword. He had tried to persuade Ruth that he was unrepentant, that the thing which had befallen them was right and beautiful; he had assured her with all the force of his being that this exquisite happiness which had touched his life and transfigured existence for him would only serve to make him kinder, more considerate, more tolerant in his home. But he knew in his heart—and the more she spoke of her own courage and her determination to guard their friendship as a sacred and therefore a perilous thing, the more deeply and dreadfully did he know it—that his happiness was destroyed. So long as ever he lived now, he must remember his Eden and mourn before the gates which were closed against him forever.

The sun which had lighted this beautiful day, and which had brought happiness and cheerfulness to so many people, good and bad, among the millions of London, but had seemed to mock how many others, who rather desired darkness and storm to fall upon the desolation of their breaking hearts, was setting now in a glory that could neither distress the mourner nor exhilarate the happy. The gentle air of the city was filled with light, which could be seen falling asleep. The deep silence of the evening, like the tolling of a far bell, could be heard even through the noise of the city. An infinite quiet brooded over the roofs of London and distilled into the hearts of humanity. It seemed as if the eternal mother were bending close

over the world in her arms, and that London held its breath and walked softly, lest it should waken the little one.

This wonderful light, this wonderful stillness, invested everything with a sense of everlastingness. The age of London appeared to be regarding itself in the mirror of the level sun. To Maurice, as he walked towards the House of Commons, everything he saw seemed to have been standing there forever. He could not feel the sense of a beginning, of growth, of decay in the houses, the streets, even in the people. Everything, he felt, was there because it had to be there; everybody was moving this way and that because it was so ordained from the beginning. In reality, they had always been moving in that way, and these houses had always been standing, these roads had always been laid, these vehicles had always been passing from the beginning of time, and they would continue forever. Nothing would ever change.

He noticed two clergymen hurrying forward, arm-in-arm, talking intently. He felt pity for them, saying to himself: "They can change nothing." He saw a harlot walking briskly, and afraid of the police, and covering her disappointment because the man whom she followed had bid her begone; and he was sorry for her, saying: "From the beginning you have been there!" He saw crippled and deformed humanity bearing great burdens; health and strength cushioned in carriages; prosperity and vice reeling from taverns; virtue and modesty shabby in the gutters; animals who were starved, tired, and ill-treated. He saw boyhood and girlhood coarsening into hardness and cynicism, respectability going by hard and truculent, angered unemployed labor that said with its vindictive eyes, "I suffer—why shouldn't you?" motherhood that was hideous and base, toil that was content with its mean reward, sin that was not afraid, degradation that was unashamed, and

childhood that was joyless—and he was neither indignant nor sorrowful.

He said to himself: "It has always been so, and so it will be to the end. This street has never been without a harlot, labor has always suffered here, priests have always been praying in that church, these taverns have always been ruining men and women, children have always wandered here filthy and in rags, animals have broken their hearts here. We can do nothing to alter destiny. There are strings to this human puppet-show which our laws cannot reach and our prayers cannot change."

When he crossed Palace Yard the hour was drawing towards seven o'clock. Lamps were lighted, and shone with a dead whiteness in the lilac-colored air. It was beginning to feel cold. A few carriages were drawn up in the Yard, the coachmen laughing and talking together, some of them smoking. A very dilapidated cab had just set down a member at the entrance, and the driver, who was grumbling over his fare, was being told to move off by the policeman on duty. Pigeons ran before Maurice's feet as he crossed the Yard. The policeman saluted with a brisk smartness that was full of deference for the Cabinet Minister.

Maurice thought to himself: "I am going back to my servitude."

He had forgotten altogether the brave tune to which he had marched so finely when he first set out. The million of Humphry Champness had ceased to exist. He was not even conscious of the kiss which had lifted him for one inexpressible moment into the very center of Paradise. He was aware of nothing but an immovable dullness which loomed through the universal gray of everlasting monotony, and which drew him towards it with the irresistible attraction of destiny.

He walked down the narrow corridors leading to the

members' lobby, and overtook the man who had been set down by the cab. He passed him without speaking, but stopped when he was hailed, and accommodated himself to the slower pace of this friendly Conservative. They advanced together, talking of the fine weather.

A roar, such as one hears in a menagerie, suddenly burst upon their ears—a loud, passionate, hideous, and tigerish roar of triumph that had no pity for the defeated.

“Hello!” cried the Conservative; “what’s that? By thunder, I believe you’re beaten!”

They both hurried forward.

Maurice made his way through the pack of shouting and cheering members in the lobby, and got round as quickly as he could to the Prime Minister’s room. Half an hour later he left the House of Commons, knowing something that the victorious Conservatives did not know.

The Prime Minister had told his colleagues that he would not come back.

He dispatched a telegram to Ruth with the news of the Government’s defeat, and then hurried into a cab and drove home. The first thing to be done, he told himself, was to send Phoebe to her father. It was not now a case of inheriting the million of money; it was a matter of getting enough to live upon.

Like a bolt from heaven this thing had fallen—this thing which meant poverty. He ground his teeth together, thinking of the election. His seat was safe, but to win it meant hundreds of pounds. Money! How could he get money? There was Girshel, but that was dangerous. Girshel was not a man he would willingly have for master. Humphry? Phoebe? Phoebe? Yes, if she could move that old man. Everything turned upon Phoebe. Would she succeed? How stupid she was! How easily she blundered things! Could he trust her? Would it be better to take the bull by the horns and go himself? Phoebe was such a fool.

He leaned over the doors of the cab, and looked at the crowds he was overtaking and the crowds who were approaching him. How full the streets were! People were flocking into London from the suburbs, full of expectation and excitement, and people were hurrying out of London after their day's work, glad to be going home. What a vast host it was, this population of London! Through the gray streets, lighted by lamps, and blazing at certain points where a tavern broke the dark line of shuttered shops, the dim energetic multitude moved with the quickness and the intensity of a flooding river. He saw how crowded were the busses inside and out, and noticed how silently and unexcitedly the passengers inside read their newspapers, or stared at each others, or looked through the doorway at his approaching cab. Did any of them care a jot that the Government had fallen? Would this awful catastrophe, which threatened his life with shipwreck, make any real difference to a single individual of all these millions hurrying to get home or hurrying to the excitement of theater and music hall? He saw the placards of newspapers announcing "Defeat of the Government," and observed that they attracted but little attention from the hurrying multitudes. Did anyone very much care?

Then his mind went back to the question of the future—his future, his own personal future. What a fool he had been to neglect old Champness! A million of money! Could that really be true? A million! Fifty or sixty thousand a year—always increasing, always multiplying itself. And Champness was old, an old man nearing the grave. Fancy if it were true—a million of money!

Richmond was blotted out from his mind. The kiss was as if it had never been given. He thought of Ruth, but only as one who might advise and help him in this crisis. A million of money! Would Ruth advise this, or would she counsel that? What would be her advice? His tele-

gram had reached her by now. What was she thinking? Would she send him an answer?

He entered his house with his latch-key, and went to his study, turning up the gas. Letters lay on his table, but he did not glance at them. He returned to the hall, passed the dining-room, the door of which was open, and made his way to the drawing-room. The sound of his children playing in the breakfast-room below came to him from the back-stairs. He opened the drawing-room door. It was dark and empty.

Phœbe was always out. He muttered angrily, and returned to his study, ringing the bell.

A servant came to him. "When do you expect Mrs. Sangster back?" he demanded, lighting a cigarette.

"She's in, sir. She's ill—very ill with the influenza. We've had the doctor. She came home just before luncheon, terribly bad."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed; "I had no idea."

"There's a nurse with her, sir. The doctor says none of the children must go to her. It's a very catching kind of the influenza."

"I must go and see her," he said, throwing his cigarette into the fire."

He thought to himself as he went up the stairs: "Suppose she should die!" Then it occurred to him that if the situation was to be saved now he himself must go and see old Champness.

At the door of Phœbe's bedroom he was surprised to find how hard his heart was knocking against his ribs. The climb of the stairs seemed as if it had exhausted him. He waited for a moment to recover his breath, and then tapped gently on the panels, in case she should be sleeping.

After two or three moments the door was very carefully opened, and a nurse looked out at him. He heard Phœbe's voice muttering from the interior, and saw the shadowy

outline of the bed in the subdued light of a lowered gas-jet.

The nurse put her finger to her lips, glanced back over her shoulder, and then tiptoed into the passage.

It appeared that Phœbe was in a high state of fever, with a temperature of 103° , and that she was inclined to be delirious. The doctor was anxious about her, and would be returning in an hour's time.

While they were standing there a knock sounded at the front-door. The nurse started, looked angry, and begged Maurice to see that the house was kept as quiet as possible.

He went down the stairs, and found a couple of his friends from the House of Commons entering his study. He greeted them, told the servant to stop, and went to his table, writing a card which told callers to ring, and not knock. "Fasten that to the door," he said, handing the card to the servant, "and keep the door of the back-stairs closed." Then he turned to his friends. "My wife has been taken ill—influenza. She's really rather bad."

Other people arrived, and the room was soon quite full of politicians, excitedly debating the situation.

One of them said to Maurice: "I understand that the old man doesn't intend to come back. We must see that you are in the running for the leadership. But I hear that Martindale is first favorite—an enormous backing among the Whigs."

Later in the evening Girshel came to see Maurice. He was pleasant enough while the others were present, but as soon as he was alone with Maurice he showed that he was greatly annoyed by the situation. "I've wasted my money!" he exclaimed. "And the Liberals won't come back for twenty years. Do you know what my wife says? She says I ought to join the Tories—the Tory democrats. I believe she's right. They've got more go than the Liberals. I'm sick of Liberals, sick of them! They're bunglers! They're fools!"

Then he looked shrewdly at Maurice. "You're in a bad way!" he said rather savagely. "What are you going to do now? Leadership of the party! Why, my boy, you won't even be able to support yourself as the obscurest of private members! You'd better go and see the old man, as I told you this morning. It's your only chance."

When he had gone, Maurice sat down and wrote a diplomatic letter to Humphry Champness, telling him about Phoebe's illness—her serious illness—and saying not a word about the Government's defeat and his own difficult situation.

It was one o'clock before he got to bed, and it did not occur to him as he lay there facing the peril of his position that Ruth had not responded to his telegram.

For three or four days he lived in a state of feverish excitement. Phoebe was now better and now worse. He wrote a letter every day to old Champness, and he received curt acknowledgments, expressing the hope that Phoebe would soon recover. He found out that his absence from the House of Commons on the fatal day had annoyed the Cabinet and angered the party. Some of the Liberal newspapers referred to it, and expressed their surprise that the only Cabinet Minister to be absent on that occasion was the democratic Minister who had been the staunchest champion of the Licensing Bill. Some people held the view that, had he been present, defeat would not have happened. There was no hope, Maurice felt sure, of election to the party leadership. The business which obsessed his mind was how he could keep his position in the House of Commons—how he could live.

He used to sit by himself, saying over and over again in his mind: "I ought to have foreseen this difficulty; I ought to have prepared for it." It was like a nightmare to his soul that so suddenly his comfortable income had ceased. If only he had saved money! If only he had looked ahead! If

only he had foreseen the dislocation of a Government defeat! With such remorse as this in his soul, it was hardly natural that he should think of Ruth Kingsford.

One day he received a note from Humphry Champness announcing that he would call at ten o'clock that morning. A few minutes before the hour Leonard arrived, telling Maurice that his father had asked him to be there. Phoebe was better, and Maurice hoped that the situation might now be changed.

Old Champness came into the study, carrying his hat in his hand, five minutes after the hour. He shook hands with his son-in-law and his son, asked after Phoebe, and sat down, placing his hat on the floor and loosening his overcoat.

"Now," he said, "I want to talk business."

The other two men sat down, half facing towards him from the hearth, and waited for him to continue.

"You're in a hole, I suppose?" he said, looking at Maurice.

"Well, I——"

"In a hole, financially; that's what I mean. Are you or are you not?"

"I am, sir. Yes, certainly."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am trying to arrange for some journalistic work."

"Are you?"

"It's the only thing I can think of for the present."

"Haven't you thought of me?"

"Of you!"

"You've been writing me very civil letters."

"I hope you don't imagine, sir——"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, all I can say——"

"The less you say, the better!" cut in old Humphry.
"You don't take me for a fool, do you? Of course you

thought of me! Directly the ground went from under you, you thought of me. My daughter's illness was a stroke of good luck. I expect you chuckled over it. It gave you the opportunity of showing me a little politeness. And you played your part well. You didn't mention your own predicament."

"I am sorry you take this view of me," said Maurice.

"Of course you are. It would suit you better if I were more easily duped. But don't be anxious. I'm going to help you."

He turned to Leonard.

"I must deal first with you," he said sharply. "I want you to know my position, and I want to know yours. Perhaps you don't know that I am a rich man. I have lived simply because I have always recognized that money is a solemn trust which we hold from God, and for which we shall have to give an account. My profits have not been spent in profligacy, luxury, and selfishness. I have devoted them to the development of the world and the prosperity of civilization. I dare say my capital now stands at eight hundred thousand pounds—something like that." He wheeled round towards Maurice. "Bigger than you thought, I expect. It's a lot of money, that, isn't it?" Then he turned to Leonard. "Now, if you want to have the handling of this money, or any part of it, you must abandon from this moment the Established Church, you must return to your father's Church, and you must give me your solemn undertaking that you will remain a Nonconformist to your life's end. I've made up my mind. I'll have no more shilly-shally!"

Leonard drew up his legs, which had been stretched at full-length, crossed them, let one of his arms slide over the back of his chair, and, looking at his father as if he were examining him as a perplexity or a curiosity, announced as follows: "I thought you said that you regard money as a

solemn trust held from God. Didn't you say that? Very well, then; how can you use it as you are using it now? Do you think that God approves of blackmail? That's what you are doing. I'm sorry to say it, but you really are. You are trying to suborn me, trying to blackmail my soul. When you think of that, doesn't it make you feel ashamed? It ought to, you know—it ought really. But I quite see that your ideas are not rooted in real wickedness. They spring from loose thinking. You have been so busy looking after your trust that you have really had no time to think out your ideas on other subjects. But you will see now, I am sure, that you have made me a very unworthy proposition. To relieve you, however, of any further anxiety, let me assure you that I have really no desire for money. If you gave me any part of your fortune, I should immediately give it away again. I believe that our Lord uttered a most profound truth when He said that it is impossible to serve two masters. I need not discuss my religious ideas with you; but I should like to say, if you will allow me to do so, that I think you ought to provide for Maurice so that he may continue his political career without financial anxiety. You owe that to Phœbe. And Maurice is a fine fellow who is really trying to put things right."

Old Champness, who had never taken his eyes off Leonard, continued to look at him in silence for several moments after he had ceased speaking. Then he hardened his eyes, drew down the corners of his mouth, and said abruptly: "Very well, then; that's settled." After a moment he added: "I've watched that silly look grow in your face till every vestige of manful, militant Protestantism had been wiped clean out. You're a Papist. You'll live to kiss the Pope's toe as surely as I shall protect my money from your friends the priests!"

He turned round slowly in his chair and confronted Maurice. "I shall find you more complaisant, I expect!

Eight hundred thousand pounds is a lot of money. It may be a million before I've finished with it. A man can do a great deal with a million of money. Well, let's see what I can do with it now. I'll try a little quiet *blackmailing* with you. Come, how much do you want for your soul? What will you sell it for? How much shall I have to give for it?"

Maurice attempted to smile, but shifted uneasily on his chair.

"I'll make you an offer," said Champness. "But first of all I want to ask a few questions. Don't be afraid; I'm going to make you a definite and a fair offer. You shan't starve. You won't have to go back to journalism. I'll look after you. But first of all I want your answer to a few questions."

Leonard rose, and said: "I will leave you, if you've no objection."

"I'd rather you stayed," answered his father.

"I have got work to do; I am sorry, but I must go. Besides, your manner distresses me. I can't help saying that. It is dreadful to me that you should speak so very sneeringly and brutally to a great man and a good man!"

"A good man!" cried old Humphry. "What, Sangster!"

"I really think you can't have said your prayers this morning," said Leonard. "I've never known you like this, not really so bad as this. Don't you think it's very unworthy? Do try and treat Maurice with politeness and charity!"

As he reached the door, old Champness said to him: "Don't come down any more to Clapham. I don't want to see you again. I've done with you."

"Very well, then," said Leonard, coming back and holding out his hand. "In that case I'll say good-by. We must shake hands."

"Good-by," said his father, touching the hand for a moment. And in this way they parted for the last time.

When the door was shut, old Champness said to Maurice: "That's a fine son, isn't it? What do you think of him? Awkward question for you, that, isn't it? You'd like to run him down to gratify me, but he put in such a kindly plea for you that decency forbids! Well, never mind! I know you thoroughly. I know what I'm buying. Now, to business. *How did you live when you broke with Girshel?*"

"By journalism."

"Stuff!"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you know that I was keeping you?"

"No."

"Well, I was. You weren't earning a hundred a year. You left your wife to bear the whole burden of your responsibilities. She came to me, broken-hearted. I provided for her. You lived upon my money. But for my money you'd have gone under."

"I never knew. Those were days of frightful anxiety. I'm grateful to you, sir, most grateful. I assure you I had no idea."

"*How much rent have you paid for this house?* You don't know! Phoebe pays it, does she? No. She pays nothing. The money you give her is not enough for the housekeeping. The house is mine. I bought it. It belongs to me."

"You simply take my breath away."

"What a position you are in for a man who aspires to govern a great country!" exclaimed old Champness. "Why, you can't manage your own house. You've been living for years upon your wife, and didn't know it till I told you!"

"But why have I not been told?" asked Maurice.

Champness smiled. "Shall I tell you? Because we wished to spare your fine feelings!"

Maurice felt himself go pale.

"Mr. Sangster," demanded old Champness, very slowly and emphatically, "don't you know that you're a humbug?"

Maurice started. "No, I do not! You are unjust to me. And really I cannot see on what grounds——"

"Stop!"

Maurice was almost terrified by the look which had come into the old man's eyes. They were merciless, they were relentless and inexorable with some appalling passion of lifelong hostility.

"Don't blacken your soul," said old Champness, "more than you can help." He leaned forward, resting his right arm on his knee, and looked Maurice straight and hard in the eyes. "I know you, Mr. Sangster!" he said between his clenched teeth, the lips working savagely. "From the first I knew you were a humbug. I got to see pretty quick that you were a rogue. But it has taken me a little time to discover your true character. I didn't know that you were a *dirty rogue!*"

Maurice sprang to his feet.

"You insult me beyond bearing!" he exclaimed, breathing hard, his eyes shining, his breath coming in gasps. "I won't put up with it! It's monstrous!"

"Remember the money, eight hundred thousand pounds! Remember that, and sit down."

"You call me the most insulting names. You think because I'm financially embarrassed . . . mean advantage . . . utterly . . . Good God! what have I done that you should address me like this? Have I lost my honor with my income? Am I contemptible and base because I'm poor? What happiness do you find in taunting me, insulting me, treating me with scandalous malignity? I'd sooner beg in the streets, sooner die in the workhouse, than receive

the favors of a man who assails me as if I had blasphemed the Author of my being and set at defiance the moral law of civilized humanity!"

"Sit down!" said old Champness. "I'll withdraw everything I've said if you can prove me wrong. Sit down, Mr. Sangster. I'm not going to pass judgment on you without giving you a chance to defend yourself. And I'm going to help you. Put off your House of Commons manner and sit down."

Maurice sat down, crossed his legs, folded his arms, and looked away from the old man at his side, frowning into the fireplace, his breath still coming sharply and noisily.

"This is my first question," announced old Champness; and then, in a tone of voice more quiet and more deadly than he had yet used, he asked: "*Where were you, Mr. Sangster, on the day when the Government was defeated?*"

Maurice started. He recovered himself, half turned his head, glanced at the terrible face of the old man, which was rigid with judgment, and replied, as he looked away: "I was out of town."

"Alone?"

There was a long pause.

"Alone?" the old man repeated.

Maurice was as cold as death, so cold that he shuddered. Sweat broke out on his forehead, and his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth.

"No; I was with friends."

"That's a lie!"

Maurice rose to his feet, but not this time with indignation. He found it impossible to keep still. He went to the fireplace, kicked at the unlighted coals, turned round, and began to walk about the room, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes avoiding the old man.

"You were with a woman, Mr. Sangster," said old Champness.

Maurice made no reply.

"You lunched with this woman at the Star and Garter Hotel at Richmond. You drank champagne with her!"

Maurice came to the hearth, placed his elbow on the mantelpiece, rested his forehead in his hand, and looked down at his feet.

"You were with a woman, Mr. Sangster, with a low woman——"

"That's a lie, a damnable and most wicked lie!" cried Maurice, raising his head. The veins were all swollen in his forehead. "Who told you that? It's a lie, a scandalous, an infernal lie!" He was quivering with rage.

"Was it somebody else's wife, then?" demanded old Champness.

"That's a lie, too!"

"Prove it a lie."

"My word is enough."

"Not for me."

"I'll say no more."

"Answer me! Who was this woman?"

Maurice, whose brain and heart felt as if they were bursting, exclaimed suddenly: "Who told you this scandalous tale?"

"Who told me!" cried old Champness; and then, watching the sharp anguish and swifter terror in the face of his son-in-law, he continued: "It's common property. You can read it for yourself in the newspapers. They're making fun of you. 'The Cabinet Minister and the Lady'; 'Champagne and the Licensing Bill.' It's a dirty joke in the dirty newspapers. Now, tell me, *who was this woman?* Was she or was she not a common prostitute?"

"Good God! I tell you, no!" How weakly, how feebly, how beatenly came this denial!

"A married woman?"

"No!"

"Then you must prosecute these papers for libel."

"How can I do that? The lady is a friend of mine. She is as pure and virtuous——"

"What! An unmarried woman who makes assignations and drinks champagne in a public restaurant with a married man!"

"Yes, as pure and virtuous as any woman in the land. Women in society are different. They do these things. There's no harm in them. It's only the filthy construction put upon such things by minds saturated with vice and blackguardism——"

"Stop! When you prayed with me in the dining-room at Clapham—do you remember?—you would have thought it horrible for a lady to drink champagne with a married man, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you have said she was no better than she ought to be? Wouldn't you have condemned the man as a dirty rogue? Come now, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, because I was young, because I didn't know the world."

"You were nearer heaven in those days than you are now! You weren't very near—you've never been very near; but you're clean out of your reckoning now. Mr. Sangster, you once called me a Pharisee. Do you remember? You sat in judgment on me, and condemned me. Dare you condemn me now? Is your soul white enough, is your heart pure enough, is your conscience innocent enough, to condemn me now? What has the world done to you? You say you didn't know the world in those days when you called me a Pharisee. Are you glad that you now do know it? Has it helped you to do your duty? Has it kept your heart clean? Has it brought God any nearer to you?"

Maurice sat down in a chair beside the fireplace, rested his elbows on his knees, held his hands to his face, and looking at the coals, said between his teeth: "I am not guilty, but I am ruined. I cannot defend myself, because a

lady is involved whose honor I must shield. Don't let us waste any more time. Tell me what you propose to do. There's Phœbe and the children. Will you look after them? Make a proposal. Tell me what you mean to do?"

He was thinking of those newspapers, those terrible gutter journals of the sporting world, which find their way into every club, every smoking-room, every mess, and every rich house in the country. He was ruined. Ruth Kingsford had ruined him.

"I told you at the outset what I had come here to do. I came to buy you, and, like a good tradesman, I have been cheapening what I want to buy. I think now that you won't expect me to give much for your soul. What do you want for it? Tell me your lowest price."

"Give me two thousand a year," replied Maurice, without altering his position; "a thousand for Phœbe, a thousand for me."

"It's too much."

"Good God!" cried Maurice, lifting his head, and turning swiftly round, "are you trying to infuriate me?"

"No, only to humble you. A thousand a year. That's my offer. A thousand a year is a large income for an honest man. A larger income would only do you harm. I want to protect you. My business is to save your reputation."

"A thousand a year! Well?"

"I am buying you, as a man buys a barrister. I am employing you as my counsel. I want you to put Disestablishment at the forefront of your programme. Nothing about social reform till that is out of the way. I want the country roused. You can rouse it. I'll send Mr. Kensit to see you. He will give you the facts. Now, is this to be a bargain?"

"A bargain? No, it's a surrender. Don't you know what you're doing? You're jumping on the body of a

man whom you've knocked down and pinioned. I surrender because I'm conquered!"

Old Champness picked up his hat from the floor, and got upon his feet. "As you behave, so I shall behave. Don't forget the eight hundred thousand pounds!"

And he went from the room.

PART IV

THE HOUSE OF LIFE

SEVEN years after the interview recorded in the last chapter, Phœbe, Leonard, and Maurice were taken by Aunt Mildred to look upon the dead body of old Humphry Champness.

He lay upon the great brass bed, which looked horribly cold and garish, with his arms rigid at the sides of his body. He was no longer a big man. The bulk had dwindled from his body, the heavy strength had departed from his face. There was nothing terrible, inexorable, or solid in this pitiful corpse. Only Leonard was not surprised by this immense change; and perhaps in looking at the living face of his father he had always seen this expression of pinched and narrow littleness which now appeared there, fixed in death. The cheeks had fallen in; the mouth was compressed with a hard intolerance; the nose, which was bluish at the end, had the sharpness of bitter, unforgiving, and masterful pettiness. All the lines were gone. It was a very small, smooth, dreadfully insignificant face, white as a napkin.

Phœbe wept as she looked down upon her father. She could not have said, perhaps, why she was weeping. It may have been an expression of remorse, for she had entirely regarded her visits to Clapham for the last seven years as insufferable interruptions of a busy and fatiguing life. Maurice, placing his hand through her arm, thought of all this old man had made him suffer, and wondered how much money would come now to reward him for his martyrdom.

Bitterly had he suffered. Beaten at Bursby, where the walls were covered with disgusting pictures suggesting that in public he was a Stiggins taking the glass of beer out of the workman's hand, and in private a roysterer drinking champagne with overdressed women in flaring restaurants, he had gone at the last terrifying moment to the North of Scotland, and had found a seat in a constituency too remote or too primitive to be influenced by scandal. He was a Member of Parliament, but no longer the representative of a great industrial center. But not for this reason did he find his position in the House extremely difficult. He had never taken action against any of the newspapers who had maligned him; and although the House of Commons did not judge him severely on this account, or think very much of the scandal, it was quite impossible for him to appear any longer in the rôle of a moral reformer. He was advised to avoid the limelight for at least one session.

He set himself to become an expert in procedure, hoping to re-establish his position, when the time came for him to emerge, as a brilliant master of tactics. While he was doing this, a humble member from Wales on the Liberal side of the House was swiftly building up a reputation for courageous attack and the most thoroughgoing and determined Radicalism. Every now and then Maurice was obliged by his relentless paymaster to speak in the country on the question of Disestablishment, a subject to which he had found it difficult to warm. Mr. Kensit was always sending his card into the House for him. The Liberal Party began to regard him as a fanatic with a single idea. His debating efforts in the House of Commons, when he did emerge at last, were not successful. His place on the front bench was not very comfortable. He found himself avoided by the aristocrats of the Party, and suspected by the Radicals. He did nothing to dislodge the Tories.

At the end of his first year in Opposition old Mr. Sangster died—dropped dead early one winter morning as he was taking down the shutters—and old Mrs. Sangster came to live with Maurice and Phœbe. The situation was not an easy one. Old Mrs. Sangster disapproved of alcohol, and came to the conclusion that Phœbe was often intoxicated. Maurice very often cut her short, quite peremptorily, in her complainings and grumblings. She fell ill, became an invalid, and a nurse had to be engaged to look after her. For nearly four years she was a source of perpetual annoyance and increasing expense. Everyone was glad when the poor old body ceased to exist.

Six months before the death of Humphry Champness, the Conservatives were beaten in a General Election. Maurice, with his exchequer almost empty, kept his seat, and assured his father-in-law that in a year or two, at the very least, a measure for Disestablishment would be introduced by the Government, in which he hoped to be Chancellor of the Exchequer. When he called upon Mr. Martindale, the Prime Minister, in answer to a summons which had set his brain racing excitedly, he found that all the offices but one were filled up. He was offered the Postmaster-Generalship.

And all through those years of poverty, wretchedness, and ceaseless toil, he had been without the friendship of Ruth Kingsford. She had expressed no wish to him that he should keep away from her. She was prepared, apparently, to go on with their friendship. It is even probable that the false step into which compassion had betrayed her was responsible for the greater tolerance and the looser religious views with which she confronted the world from that time. Certainly she lost much of her devotion, and on more than one occasion told Father Prague, bitterly and cynically, that he did but waste his time in warring with the Vatican. But Maurice kept away from her at first be-

cause he was afraid and because he was ashamed. He was afraid that she would hear of the horrible construction put upon the fatal day at Richmond by the lower and baser newspapers; and fearing this effect upon her—fearing, that is to say, that it would make her hate him—he deliberately avoided her. The contest in Bursby took him farther away from her. After his defeat there he was only a week in London before he was hurrying to the North of Scotland. When he came back, he felt that the friendship had lapsed, that it was impossible to renew it. Mr. Kensit was now a dog at his heels who made excursions into Catholic country very undesirable.

He met her occasionally, and they exchanged a few mordant opinions in the company of others, both of them uneasy and self-conscious. Maurice, perhaps, never realized that he had permanently damaged her mind. Ruth came to wonder in the end how she had ever changed her first opinion of him. She had been overwhelmed by the most bitter remorse at the beginning, but now her punishment was the knowledge that such a man had beguiled her.

Was it too late now, Maurice wondered, as they went down the stairs of the Clapham house—too late to restore his political status? He was free now of the old dead man's tyranny. With money he could entertain people. Certainly Disestablishment would go by the board. But did he still possess the energy, the force, the sincerity that can even deceive itself, which is necessary for a great political leader? And that burning enthusiast from Wales!

Three days later the will of old Humphry Champness was read to the family.

To his sister Mildred he left an annuity of five hundred pounds, and all his furniture and plate.

To his son, Leonard Champness, the picture of his wife which hung beside his bed.

To his daughter Phoebe the house in Kensington, which he recommended her to sell; twenty thousand pounds in trust for her children, the interest alone (producing one thousand pounds a year) to be at her disposal; and his library of religious literature.

All the rest of his fortune, which amounted to nine hundred and sixty-one thousand pounds, was left to sectarian agencies of the narrowest character, and to various funds connected with the Church of which he had been so dogged and reticent a member.

Maurice's name did not occur in the will. The hatred and scorn of the old man was so complete that he did not allow himself even a taunt or a gibe. Maurice was as if he did not exist.

We have sometimes wondered whether Maurice's name would not have appeared in the will if he had been able to convince the old man during those seven years of bitterness that he had repented of his sins, that he was no longer a hypocrite, that he really and truly did believe in the menace of Rome. But this conjecture has never been solved. One only knows that Maurice had a hard part to play, and played it so badly that he fatigued people.

When they were going home, Phoebe said to him: "He never forgave you calling him a Pharisee!"

Maurice did not answer.

"What a waste of money—hundreds of thousands of pounds! It's positively awful—*sickening!*"

She was dressed in the most fashionable mourning of the period. There was something in her manner as well as in her appearance which might have justified old Mrs. Sangster's opinion that Phoebe was a victim to alcohol—one of those respectable middle-aged victims who contract the habit at a dangerous time in their lives, and are never really aware that they are under a tyranny.

"Poor Leonard! Not a penny!" she continued. "All

wasted on religion, every bit of it. I feel as if I could scream. Lady Girshel thought we were going to be so rich. I expect she'll drop us now. Fancy, only a thousand a year, and he had very nearly a million pounds! Just think what a splash we might have made with half of it, only half of it! Why, we could have had the time of our life. Sickening, sickening! I'd like to burn every chapel to the ground. Doesn't it make you feel you want to swear?"

"No," said Maurice, feeling that he could burn the whole world, feeling that he would gladly force his innermost way into the conflagration of hell to wring the neck of the old man who had first made a slave of him and then had duped him, "no, I quite expected it!"

If ghosts laugh, verily the ghost of Humphry Champness chuckled as he heard that lie—that lie which surely sealed the character of Maurice Sangster in the sight of God and the angels.

From that moment he began a course of self-repression, which in time turned him into a cold, icy, supercilious, and irritable official whose humanity is destroyed. He was the worst Postmaster-General St. Martin's had ever known. He was a pompous and tiresome Minister in power, a small and trivial critic in opposition. Every session he lost ground, every Parliament he clung to the front benches, but was entirely without friends on either side of the House. A venture in journalism which he attempted while he was in opposition proved a failure; and he blamed the public. When he appeared at Phoebe's tea-table (and Lady Girshel remained a kind and generous, if quite destructive, friend to Phoebe), he considered that he conferred a favor on her second-rate guests. The more he indulged himself in cynical opinions, the more highly did he esteem his own powers. He was always passing judgment, always finding fault, always sneering. He believed in nobody. His children feared him and disliked him.

There was one thought in the poor shrivelled and hardening soul of this man which enabled him to hold his head up at the end of his life, and which stiffened him in the air of mystery and isolation which he had affected in the first instance as a pose of protection. He believed, he really believed, that he had sacrificed his political career and his life's happiness to save the honor of Ruth Kingsford. "If I had chosen to speak out," he used to tell himself, "I should now be the Prime Minister of England." One could never quite forgive him this terrible hypocrisy.

When the will of Humphry Champness had been read, and after he had stayed with Aunt Mildred for nearly two hours, helping her in the management of her affairs, Leonard left the house in Clapham and walked back to London.

It seemed as if a load had been lifted from his burdened mind—as if the will, which left him nothing, had given him everything that he desired. His face appeared to be quite happy. He walked like one who is glad to be moving and has a pleasant goal before him. The gentleness and mildness of his face had assumed a warmth of kindness, as though he loved every living thing and was grateful because every living thing conspired to make him happy. His father certainly would have said that the "silly look" had come to stay.

Only once did his eyes close and his lips harden. It was when he thought to himself for a moment of the soul of his father. "So good, so moral, so honest, so straightforward and truth-dealing," he reflected, "and yet so dreadfully pagan. Why couldn't he understand that saying, *the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of Heaven before you?* Into the kingdom of Heaven! He never even looked through the gates."

But his face cleared when he thought how easily those

gates may be missed. "One must never judge," he told himself.

He was walking straight to Father Prague. He had spared his father the blow of a conversion to Rome. He was free now, and his conviction was stronger than it had ever been before.

He said to himself: "It is perfectly clear to me that Christianity means a new life. If it is not new, it is nothing. The Methodists were right, and Rome was wrong; there must be complete palingenesis, an absolute new birth, a vital and pervasive change in the heart of every individual. One has got to feel himself born again, really born again. Without that no man can enter the kingdom of Heaven."

And then he thought of the rational objections to Christianity which had so long tortured him after his conversion to the Anglican Church. How he had suffered! How very nearly he had abandoned it all, and sunk into the indolence and indifference of agnosticism! Thank God, thank God, he had pressed on!

How easy it had seemed to him of late!

What did it mean? How was a man really changed, really transformed by this birth into a new life—a life utterly different from the life of the world? It was by passionate love and passionate surrender. It was by looking all the doubts and objections in the face, and saying to them: "Yes, I know; you are formidable, and you have a great deal—a very great deal—to say for yourselves; but you may be wrong, after all, and in the meantime I am longing for something which you cannot give me. I am longing for the sense in my soul of a central unity with all that lies outside and beyond human experience—for the peace which passes understanding, for the strength which is unconquerable, for the love which is immortal."

Surrender! Yes, glad and delightful surrender. The

loss of self, the giving of self, and the finding of the greater self. Unity, unity—unity with the All!

He said to himself: "There are two ways, I can see, by which a man may make the surrender. He may go to the penitent bench of the Revivalist, throw himself down there, and cry for mercy. I am quite certain that if I had the courage to do that I should experience this change of soul which is the new life of religion; but I shrink from it. I don't think it is horrid, as I once thought it; I don't think it is hysterical or dangerous. If I think unkindly of it at all, it is when it seems to me crude—primitive and crude. But there is another way—the older way, the everlasting way. I go that way. I rise from the great distance to which violence, revolution, and schism had borne my soul, and I return over the ages and through the ruins of the way, back to the Eternal Mother. At Her doors I will make my surrender; at Her feet I will lay down my burden; on Her bosom I will pour out the tears of my repentance."

He passed a young clergyman, whose clothes were too well cut, whose hat was too shiny, and who walked jauntily. The tone of this man's voice, as he spoke to the fashionably dressed woman at his side, made Leonard think of clergymen whom he had seen in restaurants and ballrooms. "I wish they would behave differently!" he thought. And then it occurred to him that Aunt Mildred, a faithful Non-conformist, was a far more attractive Christian than many Anglicans and Romans in his acquaintance. "What a pity," he reflected, "that we can't have a Church composed of all the nice, sweet, modest people in the other churches!"

When he arrived at the monastic house where Father Prague was domiciled, twilight had gone and night was at hand.

Above the squalor of the street and in the midst of the silence of the darkening atmosphere, which seemed to be absorbing it into itself, this large, somber, rather forbid-

ding building, with its narrow windows, its cheap wood-work, and its flat face of yellow brick, rose like a frozen Gregorian. Here and there, but with wide spaces between, the little windows, which had neither curtains nor blinds, showed a light, but no faces appeared there, no shadows crossed that yellow glow, and no sound issued thence to the sorrowful, sad world outside. The dim building was like a deserted tomb in which a few tapers had been left burning.

To Leonard, however, this familiar house had the mystery and the beauty and the solemn awe of the narrow postern which admits the soul of man to the new life. He glanced happily up at one of the windows where a light was shining, pushed open the gate, and ascended the steep flight of steps to a door, whose wide grille was open, and through which could be seen, in the dim light of a single gas-jet, the figure of Saint Joseph carrying the Sacred Child.

He was shown into a chill waiting-room, where a cheap and rather gaudy figure of Saint Mary occupied a niche in the wall, with a light burning before it, a few little common flowers in a glass vase at its feet.

Presently the lay-brother who had admitted him returned, and he followed this dark figure through flagged passages, ascended a stone staircase with an iron rail to the second floor, and walked in silence down a long corridor until they came to the door of Father Prague's room. The sharp, metallic noise of the closing of a lid of a tin coal-scuttle greeted Leonard as he entered the room.

"I am delighted to see you, my dear fellow!" said the priest, coming forward, pipe in mouth, the coal-scoop in his left hand. "You have deserted me for weeks; I have missed you," he said, taking the pipe from his mouth. "Come and sit down and talk to me. Tell me about the world, the flesh, and the devil; anything but theology!" He put the coal-scoop back in its place in the scuttle. "How

are the Kingsfords? Have you seen them lately? And when is the stupid Government going to do anything? Come, here is the tobacco. Now, talk to me, there's a dear! Lots of gossip. A little scandal. Anything. How are you, to begin with?"

He seated himself in a wickerwork arm-chair, lay back, stretched his legs, and, holding his pipe by the bowl, began to draw at it with quick energy to rekindle the tobacco; his eyes were shining pleasantly as they looked at his friend.

The room, which had a curtain over the door, was a cheerful, cheaply-furnished, and untidy apartment, which could have belonged, nevertheless, to no man but a scholar. There were some very good Medici prints on the green walls, a beautiful crucifix on the writing-table, a vase of chrysanthemums on the mantelpiece, and books in disorder on the shelves, the tables, the chairs, and the floor.

"I've had rather a difficult time just lately," replied Leonard, sitting on the edge of his arm-chair, the tobacco jar between his knees, his fingers busy filling the bowl of his pipe. "Family troubles, and the end of family troubles."

"The end of family troubles! Well, that is good, anyway. You're the first man I've seen for years who ever told me about the end of troubles—any troubles. Why, I thought troubles had no end?"

"They've no real beginning," smiled Leonard, "but they've all got an end."

"Of course they have."

"You don't see, perhaps," said Leonard, rising to put the tobacco-jar on the mantelpiece, "that I'm in mourning."

"My dear fellow——"

"Oh, but you mustn't mind. Really, without affectation of any kind, I'm quite happy. That oughtn't to sound strange, and it oughtn't to need apology. Perhaps happy is the wrong word; I ought to have said I am quite con-

tented. Don't you hate to hear people say they're *resigned?*"

"Yes, I think I do. But tell me?"

Leonard looked at the Medici print over the mantelpiece while he was taking the matches, and then, as he sat down again, told the priest that his father had died, and that all the long misunderstanding and estrangement were now at an end.

"I don't think *happy* was the wrong word, after all," he concluded. "I felt exceedingly happy as I was walking here because it came home to me that now my father understood why I had not been able to do as he wanted me to do. He was a man one could never argue with; his prejudices, which were quite worthy prejudices in a way, were immovable, and he had no opening in his mind for the large charities of the spirit. Now he has left his troublesome mind behind; he has sloughed his ancestry and his habits and surroundings, which made him what he was, and so he understands better. I feel quite certain he understands; and he could never have understood here."

Father Prague spoke of the great moral qualities which Nonconformity has contributed to the world, and said that the Catholic Church in the past had suffered by opposing this good side of Protestantism with the bad. "I have no doubt whatever," he said, "that the day will come when the Catholic Church will preach conversion as earnestly as the first Methodists or the present Salvationists, but in her own way, of course. Conversion is the door, and once through the door—Charity and the Mass. By the way, have you read ——'s article in *Quarterly Review*? Oh, it's a great thing—a really great thing. It shows the absolute break with Newmanism, which all the younger men, of course, are conscious of, but which the dear old women cannot understand; and it goes on, most boldly, but most ably and persuasively, as I think, to reveal the true catholicism

of an evolutionary religion. Do read it! I'll lend you my copy, if you promise to let me have it back." He jumped up from his chair, went over to the littered table, and returned with the review.

"I really must read you a passage," he said, sitting down, turning the pages. His face was smiling with pleasure and delight. "Here it is!" he exclaimed. "Now you just listen!" He read the passage, which was a closely-reasoned exposition of Modernism, and then, closing the review, tossed it over to Leonard, crying, "Catch!" and then laughed, stretching his legs, pulling lovingly at his pipe. "Isn't that fine, now?" he demanded. "Doesn't it make you feel hopeful for the future? And my word! can't you imagine the effect on the Curia?"

They talked for half an hour of Modernism, of books, of articles, and of the chief protagonists in the great conflict, and then the priest carried off his guest for supper. While they were eating this simple meal, Leonard studied the other men and felt envious of those whose faces wore what his father had called "the silly look"—gentle, feminine, refined, and appealing faces, in which no evidence of struggle was visible. He told himself that these men had been born in the Catholic Church, that they had inherited no troublesome legacy of stubborn Protestantism, and that they had never had to fight with their own souls for an understanding of spiritual truth and spiritual beauty; they were like painters and poets. Refinement was the very essence of their being. Worship was the very breath of their spirits. They loved.

Directly he returned with Father Prague to the room upstairs, Leonard said to him:

"You know that after I left Nonconformity I began to be worried by intellectual difficulties?"

"Yes, of course, I remember. How we used to talk about those things!"

"Well, I grew to understand the mystical interpretation of dogma, and I kept my faith; but for nearly ten years I've been wanting something else. I haven't been really satisfied."

"Ah, my dear fellow," said Prague, "which of us can be satisfied in an age of reconstruction? You can't live comfortably in a house that is being restored. All you must hope for is a corner where you can get away from the builders, and where the noise of the hammering is dulled, and where you can say to yourself, 'There's a foundation under all this mess, so the house won't fall down, and though the rain comes through the roof and the gale blows in at the window, still it will be a very much more comfortable house when the job's done!' Besides, watching the builders at work isn't such bad fun after all. And lending a hand—well, that passes the time and may be useful. It's a good age! I won't have a word said against it. How dare you bring a charge against this *so-called twentieth century!*"

"You've got your corner," said Leonard.

"Yes; I've got my corner."

"Well, I've been looking for one all these years. I'm not very particular—at least, I don't think I am, but I want a corner where I can lay down the last of my doubts, and say, 'Here's my bidance; and I won't budge till I go hence for evermore!'"

Prague examined his face carefully. "The last of your doubts!" he said, slowly and quietly. "There's no last there, Champness. From Augustine to Browning! We can't help ourselves; it's only the fool whose system is complete. We don't know, and we can't know. We aren't intended to know."

"Do you believe in conversion?"

"We are given a thread, we follow a clue, and there's a light on the way; but that's all," said Prague. "Do I

believe in conversion? Yes. I told you I did before supper. How you forget my memorable sayings, Champness! But what has conversion got to do with it? Do you think that doubt is a weed that grows only in the unregenerate wilderness? You'll find it in the most careful garden of the most convinced dogmatist—under the leaves and at the edge of the gravel paths."

"But don't you believe," Leonard persisted, "in a new birth, so transcendent and so transforming that the soul is never troubled by any of those little doubts any more? Don't you believe in that?"

"Yes, I think I do. Yes, I'm almost sure I do."

"That's what I'm seeking."

"Yes, I'm perfectly certain I do," said Prague. "And for some men I'm absolutely sure about it. There is a faith to which doubts appear so insignificant that they throw no shadow. The man who believes in the Everlasting, and who believes in the immanence of the Everlasting, and who follows on his road no one but the Living Christ, is never dejected by doubt, and he ought never to be dejected by the sins of heresy and the sins of orthodoxy."

"And it doesn't matter," Leonard asked, "whether he believes in the Virgin Birth?"

"No."

"Or in the literal interpretation of the miracles?"

"No."

"Or in the bodily Resurrection?"

"No."

"It's a surrender of one's self to the Higher Self of Christ?"

"It's exactly the same now," answered Prague, "as it was in the days when He lived on earth. He asked no questions, He put no tests. He made no mention of His Birth, and He had not yet risen. He announced the Incarnation,

which is the soul of our religion, and He said, 'Come'; and He said, 'Follow.' "

"There was one test, wasn't there? *Believest thou I can do this thing?*"

"Yes. Good man! That's quite true."

"That's what I feel. I've been moving in this direction for years; and just lately I've seen that there must come one great central and wonderful moment when a man, deciding that he will 'come,' and that he will 'follow,' says, first of all, '*Yea, Lord, I believe*'—with all his heart, mind you. That's what I mean when I say I believe in conversion."

"It's the spirit of our age," said Prague, "the quickening spirit. We are not throwing dogma overboard; we're seeking to understand, in the light of rational knowledge, what was behind dogma and what is behind it still. You'll find this spirit everywhere. You Anglicans are not alone. The young men of the Nonconformist churches experience it. They don't believe as their fathers believed; they can't, and they're seeking—but without the Mass to help them—another way of expressing their spiritual life. It's easier for Anglicans—easiest of all for them. For us it's almost as difficult as—in some ways it's more difficult than it is for the Nonconformists. We've got the Mass, but there's also our College of Cardinals. If we had an English or an American Pope it would be easier for us than for you all; but that's a long way off. Although, mind you, there's a most amazing movement among the Catholics of America—most amazing. That's where I look when I lose heart. There's a mixture of the races there, and the full air of political freedom. I'm told that even Italian and Spanish Catholics out there are moving towards Modernism, and learning to look, with quite other eyes, on the Vatican. Oh, it's a fine age, after all! If men will only stick to it, and fight it out! We don't want conversions to this or that Church any more than we want fresh heresies or a revival

of sectarian animosities. We want the conversion you just spoke about—*Yea, Lord, I believe*. We want the next generation to advance from the point where each man happens to find himself towards the larger truth. We want all the Churches to move, and at the same time and towards the same goal; that's the future of Christianity—that's the only Reunion that is possible—at any rate, for hundreds of years."

Leonard was silent for a moment; then, turning his head and looking at Father Prague, he said to him: "I think, perhaps, you are right. I think it will be a good thing if men remain where they are and work for the evolution of their Churches; but some of us seek that corner of which you were speaking just now—some of us have traveled so far already, a longer journey than most, that we want a home, not a lodging, even if it's only a corner in the old house that's rebuilding. I've been wanting that for years; I've only waited till my father could understand it. And now"—he got up slowly, and stood before the priest—"knowing my theological views," he asked, "do you think I am fit to be received into the Catholic Church?"

The face of the priest was raised, looking up at his friend. At the question put to him so suddenly, he paled, his eyes filled with anxiety, and his lips hardened to an expression of pain. He did not reply.

"Is my faith not sufficient?" asked Leonard. "Would it be difficult for you, I mean?"

The priest put his elbows on the arms of the chair, let his face rest between his hands, and stared before him into the fire. "No," he said slowly, "it isn't that, Champness." He paused, and added: "I think it's unwise; that's all."

Leonard said quietly: "Unwise!" He leaned against the mantelpiece. "Surely not unwise! My dear Prague, why, I'm simply longing, longing to lay down my burden at the

oldest door in Christendom. You don't want me to rave, do you? I'm frightfully in earnest about this."

The priest looked up suddenly. For a moment or two he regarded his friend with a searching, penetrating earnestness. "Do you mean that?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I do. It's not a new idea at all; I've lived with it ever since I was worried by doubts. I think I've been longing ever since I was at Oxford to rest myself there, to rest myself at the center of religion."

The priest got up from his chair, stood in front of Champness, and laid his hands upon his shoulders. "I'm going to tell you a very long and painful story," he said quietly. "Don't be alarmed; it will take a second. It's my story, Champness; and it's a story that you must never tell to anybody else. You will promise me that." He took his hands from Leonard's shoulders. "Now for the story. How shall I tell it?" He placed his hands behind his back, looking into Leonard's eyes. "How shall I tell it—in one sentence." Then, with a sudden look of suffering in his face, which he half-struggled to smile away: "For God's sake," he said, "stay where you are!"

THE END

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